

The Cenacle



21st Anniversary Issue
NUMBER 96  APRIL 2016

A vertical photograph of a beach at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with large, billowing clouds that are illuminated from below by the sun, creating a warm, golden glow. The sun itself is partially obscured by the clouds, appearing as a bright, glowing orb. The ocean is visible in the lower third of the frame, with waves breaking onto a sandy beach. Several seagulls are captured in flight, their silhouettes dark against the bright sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Dreams they complicate my life (Dreams they
complement my life)

--R.E.M., "Get Up"

May 10, 2016
4:37 p.m.
Harvard Square -
The old "Pit" near
the MBTA -
Cambridge, MA.

Welcome to the 21st anniversary issue
of The Cenacle, still around, still matters,
still a potent bastard, still among my best
obsessions.

Still. It's a funny word. Can mean unmoving,
like the still surface of a pond deep in
some mysterious woods, between breezy
ripples.

Can mean yet, like The Cenacle is still
around.

Neither lasts perpetually. Still things
eventually move. Things still around one
day aren't anymore. New things, new forms
arise, come, perpetuate, decay, recede, are
gone.

For nearly a quarter century I would
come to the Forbes Plaza, in sight of
these scattered metal tables, & sit
writing, reading, wasting time, visiting
with a friend at its courtyard, & go



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~~It~~ inside the venerable Au Bon Pain Cafe for a soda, or for a piss. From '92 to '02, it was as much my home — the courtyard, its four great trees, a certain table off to the side, near the railings, near the stone chess boards tables & their own denizens — as any of the apartments I dwelt.

I was a student there, jobless, jobbed, high, very high, low, pretty damned low; & when I lived out West '02 to '10, I missed it, found no place like it anywhere else. When returned to Boston, came there first. Places & people & years came & went. That courtyard remained still. It still remained.

It's gone, ~~surrounded~~ ^{surrounded} by a wire fence covered in a rendition of the coming-in-2018 Smith Plaza. Same idea. Plaza-cafe + more glass + healthier trees. Everyone in the rendition looks happy; well, busy at relaxing. The poor grumpy folks I saw all the while are missing. Strummy folks sipping puny ceps. Beggars with dirty cardboard signs of explanation & request. Smith Campus Center.



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Much of what I've writing in The Cenacle since 1992 was written at that courtyard, & in ABP Cafe. I expect in 2018 I'll find a new place in the new environs to write anew there. I'll likely find deep & low connections to make between old & new. Unlike losing a person to death, sometimes a beloved place ~~can be~~ ^{can be} lost & then found again in a new form.

I remember the cityscape of my old hometown Hartford, Connecticut, long years ago when I was 14. Many many of the places I found when I was 17 - the library, bookstores, record stores, fast food restaurants, even parks, have come & gone. Little still remains there, yet still in my memory, my heart. And, strangely, still images, unmoving even as each of them was kinetic. Most were simply torn down, disappeared, forgotten. So too with ABP Cafe & the courtyard.

They closed over a month ago, yet it's only now I've come to look, take pictures, scribble lines. I didn't want to. I had to.



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My mind is not still. At best, like a hummingbird in an moving blur. My natural state is making, mixing, connecting, sorting, sharing, sharing, scribbling, liking, loving, disliking, learning, complexifying,

What then? What this? A celebration of a literary journal still around, or a charge for a fence-surrounded still hole? Both, I suppose. These pages will form the frontpiece for Crucible 96, an issue as rife with good art works as the previous issues. It's a sunny warm afternoon in Cambridge, still here. I am near my beloved writing place, still writing, still loving it, still as a hummingbird. I'll keep coming back here, to see how construction is coming, curious because to lose one's curiosity is to give in before one's time is up. I'll remember. Memory being curiosity's favorite strange lover.

The patch of earth over there was something else & something else & something else before it was Forbes Plaza, & its courtyard, & Aubon

-28-

Park Cafe. Smith Plaza will, in its turn,
come & go. On come, perpetuate, decay,
recede, be gone.

I remember the hours & hours I spent
there, countless nights writing, Walkman
going, alone, happy as I could be, broke,
few friends, no lover, no job, no
plan. My notebooks filled & filled.

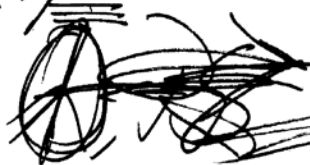
My friend Jim visiting, strumming his
guitar, twinkle-eyed ambling over to
the "Chess Master 82", beating him,
getting a drink later, laughing to celebrate.

One winter's night, so so high, courtyard
empty but me, favorite table, grateful.

still grateful,
still grateful,
hummingbirds, still,

Cenacle 96, 21 years, still, thank you—

Thank you.



5/10/2016
Cambridge, MA.

The Cenacle

21st Anniversary Issue

NUMBER 96 • APRIL 2016

Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

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NEW ENGLAND

2016

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Thank you to Mission: Repair in Kansas for fixing my MacBook Pro Eurydice . . . your devotion to doing your work well, your patience, your willingness to help, is wonderfully inspiring . . . Eurydice is in action tonight, making this issue a good one!



Feedback on Cenacle 95 | December 2015

From Tom Sheehan:

I cannot be funny or comical, even if I fell on my ass in a ditch or a bucket too small for the job. But someone else being funny or comical just blows me apart, cutting right to the funny-bone we all need to be gutted, scraped, tossed or limbered loose. Flem or phlegm, it doesn't make any difference when reading Joe Coleman's "The Paintings of Darren Grave." This one proves Joe is the "dirtiest writer" I've read in these late years of life.

For the initiate, "flem" is, in my mind, "fluid long emptied on me" in a direct manner, and two times at that, or "phlegm" is "particulates of horrid lungs emptied on ground-floor me." Again, twice in the way of delivery, like the flung flem was loosed.

Joy, like humor, can have no legal bounds, no matter how you like it, and Joe Coleman cracks me apart, that even the docs now tending me could see more than they thought they've seen. He has made me laugh harder than Jack Benny did in Korea, when I leaned on his Jeep and he said, "Move your ass, soldier, before I move it for you."

They're all B&W photographs, even the nostalgic words painting more B&W sections in Raymond Soulard's *Notes from New England*, and his sauntering pace through old New Britain neighborhoods, establishments, long-lost paths and secret meeting places that pull at my own such remembered youthful venues. I see what isn't said or written, and that's the secret of nostalgic relics that never

leave the premises, the writer's or mine. This a trip back, not for one, but for both of us, the slow joy of recovery, suddenly shaken memories, new places somebody else saw the way I see mine; the slow delights, the soft shadows, the old friends found alone and needing friendship once more.

From Charlie Beyer:

I am intrigued by Joe Coleman's description of the artist in "The Paintings of Darren Grave." He's onto something here, where art is exonerated by the self satisfied with the money, and vilified by the artists as the slime they must make their living by. To make art out of disgusting things, such that the art is hated, is truly art with its annoyance.

One needs not be mad or insane to speak truth to power. The truth is that the rich are empty and vapid and the artists are the snot under their feet to be toyed with, their desperation fueling the indifference of the elite. Darren Grave's painting shoves the snot right back up the elite snozzels, which is a profound truth about artists which does not fit with the ingratiating slave to the dollar. Good work showing this social dynamic to our face. Thanks, Joe.

From Jimmy Heffernan:

I especially enjoyed *Many Musics*, which I must say is one of the more unique pieces I have ever read. The feel of it was a little

surreal, but endearing. There were shades of the indigenous being juxtaposed with a world to which they do not, and could never truly, belong. There was a magic, both figurative and literal, in the interplay of the characters, which was original, a bit daring, and ultimately, I think, very effective. One could almost feel what it was like to be in the minds of the characters, and the environment was enchanting.

As a student of anthropology, I was deeply moved by the deftness and dexterity with which the author captured the aboriginal mindset, but there was no anachronism in the telling. A brilliant technique, that. All in all, and despite the fact that it was a very strong issue, *Many Musics* is the standout for me.

From Colin James:

In the poem “Little Purse” from *Many Musics* by Raymond Souland, Jr., there is the line: “I had the wrong kind of mind to know,” in the reference to the importance of the contents of the purse: “Two golden coins, a small dice, a device like tool for connecting.” I think the purse itself may symbolize a form of connection central to our knowledge of existence.

I used to have a little plastic purse myself as a child, and it also held what I deemed valuable, little curious things I can’t remember now. The poem goes on: “this was gift, this was secret, me to shape my mind to kind.” This line seems to follow the first line I quoted and, in a way, gives it resolution. The poem is much longer, so read it to experience it all, but I see this part of the poem this way: “Two golden coins” = “this is gift”; “a small dice” = “this was secret”; “a device like tool for connecting” = “me to shape my mind to kind.”

From Judih Haggai:

Walking with Ray: Notes from New England

Sometimes I really want to take a walk with someone. This I’ve done with Ray Souland, Jr., time and again over the years. Today, I wanted to hang out with him again. This commentary offered me that.

Ray states: “Even before I came to live here, New Britain was one of the places I would come to escape for a while. My connection to it is deep & long-lived.” Perhaps it’s my own mood, ambivalence about past, future, certainly present. But heading on the tour with Ray is just what I need. It’s been a long time since Ray revisited his academic roots. And here he does, noting the colors of hallways, the absence of landmarks as he sits on the same park bench that held him long ago.

“I’m sitting on an old wooden bench attached to what might be a train signal-switching box. I’d come out & sit on this bench & write while waiting for my laundry.” Ray’s writing, deep and ruminative, on hold till such laundry-waiting moments.

The strangeness and the familiarity, the quiet pace of his thoughts as he takes it all in, exhales his response. Calming, insightful, comforting. His old apartment building: “stumbling distance from good drunks at Rosie’s. Still neat & trim, & you wouldn’t notice it twice if it wasn’t important to you—” Me? No such nostalgia for my ex-residences. One a mass of broken shutters. Another, torn down to make room for a Steel-construction in the name of a donor.

Ray is deliberate in his commentary. New Britain and its offerings remain viewable. Perhaps it’s the December air that makes for such clear note-taking. He arrives at the campus: “here I began to learn, slowly,

sloppily—and the massive empty spaces in my mind began to fill—”

I can't help but share the conversation. Did my empty spaces fill or did they just get whiffs of downtown trends?

But Ray has an inkling that “it was here that my deepest & best habits were formed, thinking & writing habits both—” And with that insight, I stop interrupting and listen. I learn that he wrote for newspapers here. He DJ'd here. It's a place for nostalgia and acknowledgement.

Yes, the library and the memories. Then the final arrival at his place. A quiet hiding nook, where he'd read, write, listen to signs of life from centers of car lot life or student sports.

Doesn't matter, because all that was the background for his inner world. He appreciates it now for what it offered him then: “for a moment all still, his heart calm, just birds, just ripples.”

And I take off, with gratitude for being included as a companion. Thanks, Ray.

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

Colin James' “If This Equinox Would Just Get It Over With” is a sculpted, forceful poem, about climbing in the Himalayas. Urination is mentioned. We're placed into a moment and given information about the outside and the inside of the narrator's head. The moment is “intense as a bouillon cube” (Tomas Tranströmer).

James' poem “Robbery” is also a sculpted, forceful poem, about moving near a brothel. Fellatio is mentioned. Statistically, what are the chances of fellatio being mentioned in an eight-line poem? Yet here it is. James has some

lovely lines: “The wind in your hair is / from that song you hated.”

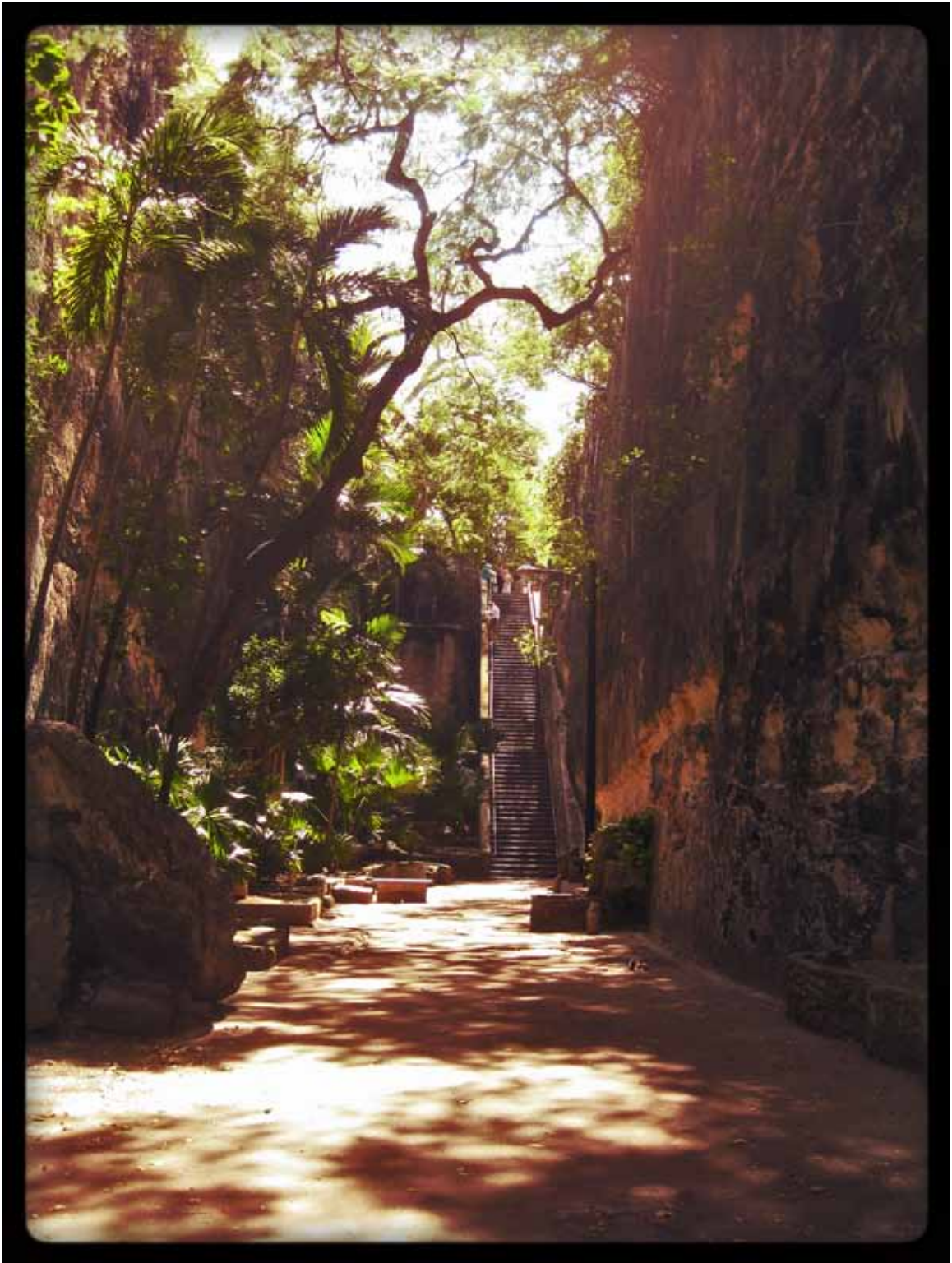
Charlie Beyer's “Homeless in Hawaii”: If I were being politically correct, I'd quibble with the author's casual bigotry: “These Hawaiians have their lineage so far up their asses they really need only one street name: Kolonoscopy Drive!” “(T)orpid 400-pound palm weaving Hawaiian princesses.” But I'm not, so I don't.

What I like about this text is that it puts me in Hawaii, land of contrasts of natural beauty and unnatural scuzziness of what passes for civilization. In the present day, when millionaires and hotels own the beaches, and we're all compromised by capitalism, is it possible to experience nature directly?

Yes, the author answers, as a homeless person—and it's true—we feel the heat of the sun, the spray, the breeze. Beyer has some lovely lines: “Though the water rises and falls in a hundred shades of emerald green, though the sunlight of the morn illuminates the wispy crown of the twisted Kiawe thorn tree, the lava boulders sit proud and black on the coastline.”

My main problem with Raymond Souland Jr.'s writing is that there's so damn much of it that it's impossible to read it all. It's endlessly entertaining when I dip into it: the oddball characters, the trippy-yet-believable situations, the sweaty fucking. When I was younger, this is how I wanted to write. Remember those paperback science fiction / fantasy books that people had in their bookshelves in the 1970s and '80s? I keep imagining Souland's writing being printed up in one of those.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Five

*Dreams they complicate my life (Dreams they
complement my life)
—R.E.M. “Get Up.”*

I return home to the hospital, arrive OK this time, & there are all my roommates in our shared room, & they're having a hard discussion about how there's too many of us, & too little room, & the acid is beginning to come on, the acid is beginning to come on, the acid . . .

I'm a Small Young Man

I'm a small young man, I'd tell ya 5'2" but I'd have to be wearing taller heels on my shoes at the time. But then I meet a woman named Evelyn, & she doesn't notice how not tall I am. She notices my smile, notices it in a way it's not been noticed before.

Evelyn is brown-haired, turquoise eyes, long & luscious, as I am short, short, *short*. Somehow me, & my sack of things, & I'm moving in with Evelyn into her two-room house.

Sometimes when I'm at home all day, waiting for her to return, I forget her name. It's something that happens to me, & I go hunting through her mail, looking through her things, trying to remember what her name is. *Evelyn, it's Evelyn.*

At one point, we're in her back yard, on chaise lounges next to one another, we're naked, lookin' up at the stars, takin' turns cryin' out “*hellllloooooo*,” until there is a noise, & in comes to the two-room house, bigger than the house, bigger than both of us, & certainly bigger than

me, even on platform shoes, Evelyn's big, bruising, bald ex-boyfriend.

Evelyn throws a sheet on me as I lie there naked on the chaise lounge—she covers up with one too—we pretend to be asleep—but he calls & calls & calls, “Ev’lyn, where’s my be’ah, where’s my dinna’, where’s my suppa?” *Things like that.*

Evelyn stands, puts on her robe, goes inside. I wait, cowering under my sheet. There’s a gunshot, lots of shooting. Evelyn comes back. She climbs on top of me in my chaise lounge, still under my sheet, but I find myself fucking her anyway. It is strange—it is shocking—but somehow wonderful—because it is Evelyn, & she wants sex now—but I want to know how she feels about me—because I’m small, & my heart’s big, & can be broken *so easily*.

I spend a lot of time looking at her picture postcards, & the photos on her wall, trying to understand my Evelyn.

You Leap! Across Time & Space

Leaping! Across time & space . . . I am back in high school, yes indeedy, *oh ho ho ho ho*. But I am taking classes now, doing quite well. Getting good grades. *Nothing keeps me down this time around.* I walk into an empty classroom, a’swaggering, thinking nothing can stop me this time. But there’s a message on the chalkboard. CLASS IS CANCELLED TODAY.

Hm. Feeling slowed, a little off now, uncertain, but then I notice a book on the teacher’s otherwise empty desk. The book is called *Nazi Jailbait Bitch*.

Kind of a porn novel, seems the title charactress seduces & kills Nazis. It’s an old cheap paperback. I wonder how it ended up in this empty classroom. Well, I sit on the teacher’s desk, my short legs swinging below me, page through it, reading about the various adventures of the **NJB**. She’s quite a clever **NJB**, & she kills in a variety of colorful ways.

They hold a world between them, balanced. His hands above, hers below. They speak rarely. He wonders about her kiss, she wonders about his touch. This is something important they do. When it ends, as it has to, & he is bleeding out from a thousand small skin pricks, each a star’s deadly jab, she stays right there, so close, loving him, hating him, making sure his last view of the world are her eyes, what he once called “the opposite of turquoise,” to his last breath, watching her eyes.

But then I decide whoever owns the book will value it enough such that I should leave it where it is, on the teacher’s empty desk in the empty classroom. And I leave, having gained a little bit of the literary experience for myself from that volume, & ready to move on.

I walk home, each step again leaping me back across time & space. Arrive to a not-quite-then-nor-a-quite-now. It’s the little gas station convenience store I worked in, when much younger, the one built right on top of the spaceship buried in the earth. Down a flight of stairs found

at the back of the store's walk-in refrigerator, but a locked door below kept me from exploring it too deeply.

I find myself back behind the cash register, watching the security video monitor of my friends, my dear brothers back at that old brown-paneled barroom we used'ta haunt like a pack of grimy ghosts, all now long lost to me in time & space. They're laughing, they're shaggy-haired, they're grabbing each other's shoulders & hands. *They're funny as fuck.*

And sometimes I just feel like I'm walking blind through the world, wishing I could make a valley for all my loved ones to live together & maybe, *oh you know*, open up the valley to others. Random guy walks in & says, *I love your writing, man*, & I say to him, *I love your writing, man*, & we hug each other affectionately, & it seems as though I'm left wondering what does it mean to be bound by space & time, by finitudes of memories, by the affections that wax & wane in the human heart, & the miracle of the greener world, & the miracle of music, & the miracle of *breathing in, breathing out*, & keeping somehow, some way, by years & miles & years & miles, your heart open to all.

. . . so I stretch out on my bed, long legs dangling far over the edge, curtains closed so I cannot see the many other beds in the room . . . & so I put on my headphones, turn on my cassette player because that very day I'd recorded off the radio a new album by my favorite band . . . sink into my music, sink into my hospital bed, deep into my hospital bed . . . listening to those songs I recorded off my radio, holding the tape player near to the speaker, & they're all wonderful songs, deep, tragic in ways I don't know, they're beautiful, beautiful songs . . . they make me happy . . . & then the DJ, Commander Q, says the name of the album is Wish You Were Here, & I think that too, tonight, thinking back, thinking forward, thinking across those miles, turquoise eyes, turquoise eyes, wish you were here . . .

I'm Going to School

I'm going to school again, now, Evelyn smiles me each time I leave for class, my *Tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard* lunch box in hand, trying to make myself something after all these sad nothing years.

At my school, there's a woman who keeps following me around. Oh, it's not romantic or nothin' like that. She's an automaton, & she wants me to kill her, & she hands me two guns for the task. She pleads & begs & says *just finish me & you'll be a better man for it.*

Well, we walk out to a empty park with lots of trees, & find a particularly nice tree where I promise I'll bury her under, give her some dignity, being she doesn't feel any.

And I shoot right at her, & they don't work right, these guns, they seem to go off wrong, & yet

one bullet does seem to pierce her head, & she dies—or she seems to die—falls heavy to the ground—and I realize I don't have a shovel—so I use these guns to dig a hole.

It's not a very good hole, & so I have to disassemble her into much smaller pieces by hand, & some of her screws don't come out right so I have to snap them off—but eventually I get her all into pieces, & I sort of line them up in the hole with a little bit of dignity to the whole thing—and I don't exactly say a prayer over the whole thing but I do say, *I hope you rest in peace.*

I find myself wandering the campus trying to dispose of the guns, & that seems to be a harder thing to do than I thought. At one point I end up in the dorm room, maybe it's my old dorm room, maybe it's a friend's, from the month I tried the local college. I'm smoking something good on the TV, maybe to take my mind off the whole thing—it's important & not important at the same time.

—& there are no lights on in the dorm room—though it's nearly noon—and there are people sleeping in it too, maybe sleeping off a party, I really don't know—and I turn on the lights from a bank of switches, & the people sleeping complain—though it's nearly noon—and I can't get them off again—and I think to myself, *goddamn*, & I go over to the wall, & it's a brick wall—there's a brick loose in it, nobody's looking because they're all asleep—and I pull the loose brick out, it's tough but it comes out.

Behind the brick there's empty space, & so I shove the guns in there, put the brick back in place, & realize the deed is done, so go back to smoking my TV program. There are others watching me now, but *they just don't know.*

It was a movie, or a dream I had that night, listening to that cassette of my favorite band on my headphones in my hospital bed, or maybe it happened to me, why I ended up in this hospital bed, in this too-crowded room, with the quarreling roommates, the acid coming on, the acid coming on . . .

Their village was gone, destroyed? We find a group of people traveling together. They embody their lost culture. They carry its trinkets, its memories, its seeds, & they travel on & on. They become adaptable to many situations, to the dryness, the parched heat of the desert, metallic chill of the mountains, the strange magick of certain Woods &, on occasions when everyone seems to feel it, & they do a lot, a sad collective feeling, they will brew a trinket tea together that will allow them to cluster dream & live anew in their lost home, to walk around, to touch its details, its smells, tastes, the faces that are not among them anymore, what the air was like, important sounds & not important sounds. It helps them greatly, these rare nights, to keep going . . .

There Was This Woman I Knew, Older Woman

There was this other woman I meet at school, older woman, sixty, eighty, a thousand, it was hard to say. Plain-looking woman but somewhat strange. We near each other, sometimes get along. Both back at school, trying to turn our nothing selves into something at last.

There was one time in the cafeteria where she's sitting with someone else, & I was sitting nearby. I had my favoritest peanut butter jelly & cottage cheese sandwich. *Favoritest*. I would make it up in Evelyn's tiny kitchen, & I'd wrap it in tin foil, & then I'd put it in a plastic baggy, & then I'd put it in my little sandwich-carrying case, & then put that inside my *Tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard* lunch box, & I would make sure nobody touched my lunch box but me, because I knew what a tasty sandwich lay within.

But then he left, & now we're sitting together, chairs facing each other, & I want to take her hand, talk about a man's feeling of possession, but I don't quite, & anyway she'd probably misunderstand & think I meant me & her, when I didn't at all. I was just practicing for later that night with someone entirely different. *Evelyn, of course, you know that.*

But she has to go. I can tell she has to go because she's putting her screwdrivers, wrenches, & various colored nails back into her strange wooden box. It had all sorts of symbols on it. You won't find them on the Google, or in big dictionaries, or in arcane volumes in the library. No, sir. It also looks like it had been through fire a couple times. There are scorch marks on it, a couple dents. It's a wooden box but it looked like it had sailed the seven seas.

I collect my spoons & stuff them into my bag, but it's too light & I panic. *Where is my sandwich? Oh, there you are, sandwich. Still in the sandwich container.* I was very worried but now I feel reassured, & then I depart too, & I'm back working in my office.

The school gave me a job to help me pay for my classes—which is located at the part of the building that's not yet built, so it's actually a worksite—but I have a cubicle in the middle of the worksite. **CLICK-CLICK NOISE-NOISE** all day long. The crazy sounds of work around me as I'm trying to type on my typewriter, fill out forms, answer the telephone. Most of the questions are about the live feed from 1968, it's glitchy today, & seems to only show war riots, nothing pretty, nothing hippie. People call and complain. *They want hippie.*

Late afternoon, as often happens, all the workers in their hard hats gather in a certain corner of the worksite to watch a sort of live cartoon that appears there every day to entertain them. Some kind of pretty girl dancing merrily, her face grows older, younger, she's shy, she's bold, she clearly delights in dancing for the workers until their break is up, & then she departs, & I go home but, again, *no one touches my lunch box.*

You wonder what kind of project could this be & if I tell you it is a film, you would not believe me & say, oh no, strange sir, film was conceived only recently, & I will say to you in response, you have



not seen *Remoteland*, you have not seen *Remoteland*. You have not seen *Remoteland* . . .

There Are Numbers Crawling Along Every Surface

We finish together & we smile & I am ready to tell Evelyn why I am so short now, 5'2", if that, this is an important part of why, she listens, & I watch her listening, & she smiling prompts me to continue when I am too long silent watching her listen—

There were numbers crawling along every surface that I could see, & there were letters & symbols & formulators & someone said, *read 'em, what do they say?* I peered closer & I couldn't see because they kept changing, I couldn't focus on one number or letter or symbol long enough to see what it said, because it changed the moment I focused on it to something else, *something else, something else, something else*.

& they crawled on my hands & they crawled on the ceiling & they crawled on the walls & they crawled on the pictures in the picture frames & they crawled on the windows & they crawled on the floor & they seemed to adhere to the kind of surface that they crawled through. Sometimes they were more old-school computer style numbers, sometimes they were more curvy, sometimes they were pixely. They took on the form of what they crawled on.

& there was nothing to say about them. There was no explanation really, there was no *this is what it means*, & yet it wasn't meaningless, but it had no meaning. It was somewhere in between, maybe somewhere off that narrow scale. *Wow. Fucking wow.*

Went on all night, went into the next day. I climbed the stairs &, instead of on the floor there being numbers, there were patterns, strange craquelure patterns, but everywhere else numbers, & I'm still looking for them even now.

"*Even now*," I say, not quite meeting her turquoise eyes.

What I keep mind of is your turquoise eyes. That's what I keep mind of. For you see, what happens over time is that it seems like first you are you & then I am you & then you are me & then I am me again. Sometimes I am the raggedy fellow & you are the long-haired girl with the turquoise eyes & sometimes I am the raggedy girl & you're the boy with the turquoise eyes, but you see it's the turquoise eyes that always keeps me knowing what is what. They remain your constant, girl or boy, whichever is whichever, however things sort between us, & it's a good thing too for, in this new place we've come to, things look perilous.

We have to learn how to adapt & adjust, we may have to stand in different lines, we may have to sleep on different floors, we may have to speak in different tongues. I think to myself, this is only temporary, I think to myself, as long as I can pick out your turquoise eyes in any situation, any pro-

file, any raid, any examination, any time there's raising waters or drought, any time under any star, amongst any kind of soil, in & among & through, however it may be, words words words words words words words, ahhh, turquoise eyes. It's OK . . .

Tiny Little . . . Individdle

You see, Evelyn, it's like also this. Once upon a long time ago, might have been a Tuesday, I was looking to make the acquaintance of a tiny little individdle. A tiny little individdle. & this individdle has been an individdle part of my days & nights ever since. A tiny little individdle.

One time I was in a situation where I could not believe that she was multiple sizes at once, & it was a dangerous situation in which all the circumstances surrounding it were uncertain. There were strange faces, there were swaying hands, there was skipping music, there was some kind of dark & eerie, as it were, & I worried the fate of this tiny little individdle.

I swept her into my hand, I hustled her along, sometimes she was too entirely big for me to move much, except by sort of a nudging gesture of my shoulder to her ankle that towered above me, & sometimes she was many at once, a horde of her, crazy-eyed & cackling merrily, but I worked to find every single one of her, & *oh!* I made sure that I found them all, even as their numbers shifted higher & lower & stranger still.

—& I can tell you now that, as of this telling, this tiny little individdle is as safe as I can possibly cause such a being to be, with her love of the game, the shenanigan, the cackling trouble or, as she likes to say, *click-click noise-noise*.

His Name, I Say, Is Daniel

His name, I say, is Daniel. He is a man who has been washed over time by event, person, world, his own body, washed, washed, & washed again. In the last year of his long career as a local sports hero, beloved, best of all players, playing aching always, or just plain injured, playing for a team the shell of its old championship days, his heart still the hero's even though his body is slower & battered, he persuades all his teammates, except for two, as the season is winding down, the end is near, he says, *why are we earning all this money? We're terrible. Let's donate the rest of our paychecks for the remainder of the season to the good charity. Let's just do it.*

Oh, there's a big event, he doesn't want it, he just wants them to do it quietly but someone gets a hold of the story, & this last good act of his as a professional ball player is pronounced far & wide. Someone later on, years later, long past his time, wants to do a documentary on the man, remember him on film, & the only sequence of this unfinished film that is ever recovered from the fire is a scene where there's a crash & we arrive suddenly above ground on the subway train as we come out to near his home where he grew up, sparse green, many strange houses, some

seemingly built from the bottom up rather than the top-down.

Half-filmed is the story a childhood friend of his told about the time when they were mere tykes in the sweet store—& they'd gathered all their money from paper routes, shaking down littler kids, stealing off their parents' bureaus, finding coins in sewers—they were in this sweet shop, & they knew they could have bought the same sweets somewhere else cheaper, but it was finer doing it this way.

He said, *it's finer doing it this way because they'll put it in a fancy-looking bag with a ribbon, & we'll look like we're just sittin' pretty, bag full of this sweet candy to share between only us.*

He remembers his last morning as a ball player, the last game he was going to play, probably was not going to play more than two or three minutes of it, maybe throw a basket or two, everybody was going to clap too loud, call it good.

He was lying that morning in his bunk, thinkin' *what kind of Mac-Donald's breakfast am I going to have this morning, is it going to be a big one or a small one?* If it was the last day of your professional basketball career, & you'd already donated all your money for most of the season, so you were kind of on a low budget now, what kind of Mac-Donald's breakfast would you go for? Where would you scrape up the nickels & quarters?—& as you did, would you be thinking to yourself, *wow, this is like way-back-when all over again?*

"You were the friend from his childhood?" Evelyn asks.

He nods.

"You were taller then?"

"So damned tall, Evelyn."

I'm Listening to My AM-FM Transistor Radio

She says: What were you like when you were a teenager? Tell me a good story. I can't think of any, so I tell this:

I'm listening to my AM-FM transistor radio late into the night, I listen to song after song, it's like medicine as they say, & I find this singer, his name is James McGunn, & they play a lot of songs by him on this late night radio show hosted by this strange gent called Commander Q, & James McGunn has this album out, it's called **Sco'u'tland**, sort of a strangely punctuated version of *Scotland*.

It's a 90-minute long album. I save up my money & I buy it on LP, double LP, perhaps even cassette tape as well. I look him up in the music review books, & he has other albums too, some they like & some they don't, & I wonder who he is, who is this James McGunn?

When I'm not listening to his double LP **Sco'u'tland**, I'm walking down the street with my

transistor radio poked right at my ear, hopin' he'll come on. Maybe Commander Q will have an interview with him. Maybe I'll find out more. It's hard to say.

Later on, I'm just sittin' somewhere with my favorite com-puter & we're having ourselves a good ole time, not doing much of anything, but just sitting with my com-puter, & it starts raining, & my com-puter fills with rain, all her ports, & I panic, try to shake them out. I look around for shelter, & I find this college bookstore, & I bring her inside, & just try to shake her out.

It's just very strange, it's like water that goes sideways & vertical & sticks—it's some kind of gravity-defying water—and I remember this song by James McGunn, it said,—& it was very reassuring though I didn't understand it at the time as now I do—it said, *when the water starts to fall up, forget the king, bring your cup.*

(She laughs merrily. My strange years before her delight her & turn her on. Every time.)

NJB likes to say to me: these are the kinds of things you hear when you're riding the local bus & people get to talkin' about their lives & their times & they sometimes tell you lurid details of their escapades, because you see these people are desperately lonely & sad, & they don't understand how the world has tromped on them, year by year by year by year, & the only thing I can say in response to all of this is that some of those strange things really happen to some of those strange people, & so I say to you tonight, one & all, most sincerely: CHOMP THE ORANGE, DO YA?

Then I Traveled to a Place Called Oorous

Sexxy, placing the tab on your lover's tongue, watching her chew, swallow, watching him watch you as you chew, swallow. Telling the next story, as the acid is coming on, *oh, luva, the acid is coming on . . .*

Then I travel to a place called Oorous. Seems at first to look like a town, a nice, small town. But I find out eventually that it's a sort of slave camp run by the aliens whose ships have always been overhead.

I arrive in the guise of a reporter, taking a break from his big city newspaper life to write his novel, take the room above the coffee shop, & I come down every morning for my coffee, my raisin toast, light butter, & sometimes a hard-boiled egg.

I set up shop at one of the tables under the elongated awning that the coffee shop features to keep its patrons safe from rain & shine, as they enjoy their beverages & their conversations.

I set up at my table my notebooks, my pens & pencils, a couple of novels I'd like to try (in-

cluding the new one by Darling Darlene Danger, & my umpteenth read of Cosmic Early's *Aftermath*), & I'm ready to roll. I get to know people though over the course of my days. Oh, there are some times when you'll see me hunched down low, scribbling away, blind to all but my page.

—but then there'll be other times I'll be looking pensively off into the sky, tapping the pencil against my front teeth—& that'll be a good moment to stop & say hi, & chatter a little, & so I get to know people this way. I get to know that paperboy & teach him that the proper way to eat a Danish, *son, is to keep it wrapped in its plastic & to nibble away. That way you do not get sticky, nor do your newspapers when you deliver them.*

He gets roughed up later by a couple of toughs, who I believe are in cahoots with the aliens. They drag him into an alley to beat him up, 'cuz he was seen with me too much, pallin' around.

I go to that alley & fists start to fly, & they are cowards, these two toughs, & they admit that it wasn't their idea, & *I said you're not going to do this again. You're going to tell those alien motherfuckers this boy is OK. Got me?* They bleed, shiver, nod.

Eventually, the aliens turn on me too, warn people to stay away from my writin' table—& I start to get kind of lonely, as people shy their eyes away from me as they pass by—ones who used to smile upon me—until one morning a black man shows up, tall, handsome, well-spoken. I've heard he's the town minister.

He says, *I understand your problem, & I appreciate you stayin' around*—& I say, *are you really the minister?*—& he says, *no, they got him in hidin', we didn't know what those alien bastards were gonna do to the town leaders when they first arrived, so they think I'm the minister, & they steer clear. They aren't sure what this God thing is about, & they aren't ready to find out yet.*

There were missing pages near the end of NJB, & the very last page was a mangled fragment. But I read it & memorized it & liked to speak it breathlessly into your turquoise eyes: "Wars in the future will be fought in the mind by drugs, dreams, televisions, internet, sex, persuasion, the manipulation of loyalties, needs, desires, to the point where to obey is to receive pleasure & endorsement & to disobey not punishment but simply nothing. Physical war, impoverishment, suffering, disease, prejudice have all been eradicated at the cost of freedom & self created identity. This epoch is not sustainable because the world is too badly damaged."

Where are you, Turquoise Eyes? Where are you? Why am I in this hospital bed? Who am I, Turquoise Eyes?



I Was Trying to Find Someone

Evelyn finally replies. She likes us to sleep with the bedroom shade open, the moonlight, the stars, the obscure green-&-gold neon sign glare from the S&G Pizza place next door.

I was a very young woman at the time, & I was trying to find someone. We're far from each other. I try sending her a note, use a pen that writes on her paper where she's sitting in that ratty old arm-chair she likes, & I tell her where in the city to go.

She gets up slowly, & gets ready to go slowly, & she floats along, following the course of the river, sometimes floating above the river. She holds the pen & pad in both hands, & I'm writing her instructions on what to do next. Her replies on my pad are short & illegible.

*Sometimes I see from her point of view, as she's floating along to meet me, & we're approaching each other, & I sometimes see from my point of view & her point of view both. We arrive at the same moment through the same cave-like entrance of the bookstore, same aisle, same bookcase, holding between us a book entitled **Labyrinthine**, & it's falling apart. We look at the back cover, & read that **Labyrinthine** describes six stories of imprisonment, each a different kind. **Hm.***

*I begin to sing to her, holding her small soft hands, to reassure her that her long lost soldier boy will come home. I look into her face with all the love I can offer, & reassurance, & I start to sing, **love is a battlefield, love is a battlefield, love is a battlefield.***

He Was the Boy . . . Who Knew Two Sisters

"He wasn't supposed to be a basketball player. I knew that. He knew that. For years, I would see him playing ball on my black-&-white TV with its Antennar 2000, the kind that gets you in 3 channels, not just 2, & I would watch him score & score, pass, block, lay up, push his teammates to be the best possible, hand them round the championship trophies as they came, every spring for six straight seasons, held each one up for just a moment, then hand them 'round to each of his teammates for them to hold, them to feel that shiny, buzzing pride of *winning well*.

"But, Evelyn, I knew the true story. He'd told me. We had a night back in high school, years before, a reunion night, first since our candy-buying days, we were in the same store in town, the gas station convenience store I would work at in a few years, the only one the alien slavers let us run without interference, & we came face to face, him much taller than back when, me growing shorter as I continued to do, & he nodded, & I nodded, & we went back to where we would go in those candy-glorious days, down a long, dingy road, down a hill alongside it, through swamp & reeds, come to a dirty river that ran under a noisy bridge, & sat on the hill under that bridge, & he brought out a big-ass craggy pipe for us to smoke, & he said, *this baggy has the last of my Turkish black hashish, & you & I are going to smoke it all, & I am going to tell you why I am joining the basketball team tomorrow.*" And we smoked ourselves blind, silly, silent after a long while, after he'd told all, & then I knew what nobody else did, forever.

“He was the boy who knew two sisters. The younger one prettier, of course. They’re friendly to him. They’re performers & started talking to him between sets, & then they step back inside the roughly constructed performance building, & they are among many performers taking their turn, sort of a calliope of talent & freakishness.

“—& these two sisters are performing with their father on one of the stages, singing as he plays guitar, & their singing moves him, moves him deeply. For a moment, he forgets his wants & his desires, his frustrations, whatever brought him here, there’s just this music. *This beautiful music.*

“Later on, there’s the fires the performers like, they light them in the field near the performance building, so many dancers, so many drummers, & he finds himself in shadows with the younger one, feeling her up, saying *my god, you sing so beautifully with your sister, your father playing, & you have such beautiful tits too.*

“—& she laughs, blushes, says *thank you*, but looks somewhere else, toward the many dancers, the many drummers, & he slowly lets her go & thinks *that’s it*—he goes back to where he’s staying—he’s not staying with the performers—no, he has a crappy tent, a few possessions, just another refugee.

“But he begins to gather things, he begins to go to places where he can find paper, he digs himself up a pencil. He finds different colored paper. He finds different colored pencils. *It’s amazing what you can find when a passion grabs your Art, inflicts your mind.*

“—& he begins assembling a colored book filled with colored penciled poems, for the younger sister. He puts it together, ties it with bark & twine, assembles it roughly but sincerely. It’s finally done & he brings it back, he stands in the shadows, watching their performance.

“He has his book in his hands, of all these words he’s written, he’s found in himself poetry, praise, longing, desire, put into words. If only some of it, & he’s holding this book & the singing so moves him again, so deeply & so dearly, that all he can do is leave his book on a seat in the very last row, & depart before they finish their last song.”

Down in the hospital basement something’s going on that I’m connected to. Something such ordinary folk as my roommates don’t know about. Something to do with the machinery, the blood & the marrow & the bones & the muscles & the tentacles that undergird this world & all its beauties & terrors.

That’s what’s down in the basement behind a thick door with massive lock that I only have the single key to, & I keep the key hidden on the third floor, the floor my roommates don’t know about. All the walls have been knocked out on this floor, so it’s one big room. You may also notice all the broken glass on the floor, every last instrument, every last drinking glass has been smashed, & I won’t tell you what or how or why right now.

I'm Working at an Office, but the End of the World Has Come

I'm still working in the office, the construction around me has finished, but the end of the world has come. I find myself in the file room with crayons, drawing a map to the Place of Art where we plan to go. Before leaving, I walk down the hall, to see my boss, & she's not in, & I realize I'm just going to have to go—and I leave the office, & I leave the building, & walk down the street.

Things are collapsing around me. There are colors missing, certain words in the language are gone, & things begin to rumble below me, above me, along my arms. *Rumble rumble*. I walk, then run, to her two-room house, fetch her, we bring one knapsack each, follow her map far out of the town, follow it loyally until we find the Place of Art, deep in the White Woods, & here we are in the Place of Art, & we walk in, there's a clearing, she tells me to close my eyes, & we begin.

—& it's a visual book I see with my eyes closed & I'm reading my way along, a long apartment, narrow, living room one end, kitchen & bathroom on the other, & I'm reading in long straight swathes along it, a very crowded party is around me.

I read back & forth across the apartment but I am *in* the apartment now. I'm *in it*, not just reading it. I live there with my beloved Evelyn, this is my home, & it's the night before leaving, & I want to make something of this. I want to read one of my longest poems to everyone. I want to give out copies to everyone so they can read along too, but my beloved Evelyn says *we only have fifteen copies* & there are way more people there.

They are crowded from one end of the apartment to the other. Finally I have a microphone & I call out, *does anyone have a drum to play while I read my poem?* But nobody seems to know me or pay attention. I begin to think, I begin to wonder, I begin to get curious as to what's really happening here.

I open up my eyes for a moment, & see the quiet Woods around me, see Evelyn as a sort of buzzing glow nearby, & realize I'm in two places at once, & I can come back here anytime.

I close my eyes again, & I walk through the crowds, & I come to the back door, & there's a girl returning through the back door, & she's just pissed on the back porch.

She looks at me & says, *sorry*.
No, you're not, I answer.

—& I still want to read something long, poetical, with grace, whimsy, dark hope in these dark times, but I can't do it. I can't do it now, & I keep walking until I find that I am now at the other end of the apartment, but I see that people leaving. Crowds of people leaving, going out the door, & they're going onto the landing, & they're getting on their bikes, & I just want them to *stop*, want them to *stop leaving*, want them to *stop staying*, *I want the end of the world to stop*. *Stop*, I say. *Stop*.

I hear her voice in my head, & she says, *just open your eyes & wake up, & I do.*

*I wake up, & I am again in the strange metallic chair in a spaceship high high **high** above the earth. Trying to explain to them something that we had all come up with, all of us, men & women, the best of those remaining, the ones who hadn't panicked & given up.*

We'd decided to call it United Earth because it was a simple phrase that covered everything that needed to be covered. If we couldn't be united, that'd be about it, & I was trying to tell them about it. But I kept drifting back into dreaming, & each time the dream was different, there was no connection between them, there was no link.

*I wake with some strength & I try to tell them that we meant it this time. **We meant it. Please help. Please help, we need it,** & then I drift away, & find myself in my school again.*

It's a long, long building, & I walk to my classroom on the far end, having missed class again. Find out it's cancelled, & I don't know where to go because I have missed so many classes that I thought today, when I woke up so full of energy & life, I was going to catch up on all my classes.

*I was going to do what I had to do, talk to the teachers, even Mrs. Wordsley with her spooky box, talk to others & say, **this is the day I put my foot down & get it together,** & just as I'm getting it together the class is cancelled, & just as that happens, & I'm sort of wandering away vaguely, well, this man comes up to me & says, **hey, big man, you have a big hole in your pants, on the back,** & I sort of lean back, twist my neck around & sure enough, there's a big hole in my pants that I hadn't even noticed.*

*I thought, **I've got to go back to the hospital room where I keep my other two pairs of pants & change, & get this pair of pants fixed,** & it's getting all so muddled, it's not perfect, what of those vows, & I drift & drift & drift toward those pants, & eventually I find myself awake in the metallic chair, talking to them again about United Earth, & it seems like they're saying, **we want to believe, we want to believe you this time, but we don't know if we can, & we don't know if there's time, & we don't know if this isn't for the best.***

*& I'm nodding & I'm thinking, I'm thinking that if I don't say something useful here I'm going to just drift away into another dream, & it's just going to be pointless because eventually I'm going to wake up back down there & I'll have accomplished nothing but caused myself a lot of pain & so I say to them, with what's left of me, **there is a future in which we all live together, & there is a big library that we go to, to remind us of our sordid & bloody past, & some of us will stay there for weeks, if not months, to study it, & to try to figure out what not to do wrong again, & we need your help to build that world & that library, & that library will be our promise to you, please help,** & then I drift back again into dream.*

There is a Town, Far from All Else

We breathe slowly, deeply, in, out, in, out, & close our eyes again, & travel deeper into the Island's magical White Woods, until we find a clearing.

The clearing becomes a temple, shaped by the full moonlight—

We enter the temple, & arrive to the deep desert—

We pass along, far along, deeper into the desert, & come to a little shack with an exotic nearly toothless little man who gnatters high & low at us, & Evelyn laughs & gnatters high & low back at him, & I try to, & I'm not so good at it, but I try again & again—

—& he whispers in her ear, then mine, the words we need to send us on our way to the town deep & far from anywhere else—

—& we will travel & travel & eventually though we come again to the Woods, & there is a road—

The road brings us to the Village he whispered about, & the Village doesn't have many buildings in it, it's hardly a Village at all, & we have to pick the right one, but there are so few. Evelyn points, *there*. The one with no main entrance.

It's huge. It's like a mountain of a building, like it's cut from rock itself, shaped into doors & windows, floors & entrances, unknown number—

—& we enter through a door, a guess, a hope it's right, & come to a room, lined on three sides with books, floor to ceiling, on the floor, there's a fireplace crackling & snapping, & before us a small chair, & an armchair turned away, & there is someone in that armchair that you cannot see that motions us in our minds to each sit in one of the little chairs, to be comfortable, to be ready to learn.

Are you ready to learn the secrets of this strange town called Wytner?

I Heard This Story at a Bus Station

This someone then speaks: “I heard this story at a bus station. I was traveling somewhere far, I'm not sure where I was going, but I had my ticket. I sat next to this old man with a long beard, ragged kind of Army-looking clothes, & he told me that his blood was sick, & that he was dying, & he said that he was doing his best to comfort those around him who did not know how to handle these things as he had learned to.

“—& he said there was this particular moment when he found himself with a group of friends,



some of them new, some of them old, & they were in a monastery museum, looking at the blood canvases on the wall, the red bulbs along the staircase, the fake eyeballs hanging in profusion by wires from the attic door.

“—& he finally led them out onto the roof, oh you couldn’t go out on the roof of this monastery museum, but he found them an open window, & they all climbed out, & all these new & old friends of his, & he showed them the sky from this peculiar perspective.

“It was a beautiful night. Sunset was strange, sort of golden & green, but beautiful, lovely, soft. If anybody had a hand in making this sunset, they were both artistic & skilled, enormously inspired, & he touched each of his friends on the shoulder, tall & short, long-known & new, & he said *just look at that sunset!*

“He said: *Every time you see a sunset like that hereon, long after I’m gone, think of me, & then one day, when your time has come, you bring your group of friends up on a rooftop that doesn’t expect you to be up on top of it, & you say the same thing to them. You say, **look at this sunset!** Feel it, don’t worry about its details & words. Feel it, & tell them to think of you, & pass it on to others.*

It Doesn’t Begin Well

Someone then cackles a bit & speaks the other version: “It doesn’t begin well, on this Island. I’m scared, I’m running. Some kind of dead or deaths behind me. I didn’t cause them, I saw them, heard them, & I’m running, running, & eventually I find that I get to as far on this Island as I can, & away from the scary thing I was running from. *Was it a Beast? What was it?*

“Hours pass, then a few days, then longer, & nothing happens. I begin to assess my situation more calmly. Oh, I’m still scared, look in every direction often, but here I am. *On this Island.*

“I study my camera that I brought. It seemed so important before all those tragic scary things that happened after I arrived. But the camera was meant to take pictures of the strange things that they say occur on this Island, the strange thing this Island is. This Island with the mythical timeless portal, that will not be found on any map, & I brought a camera, & I was gonna document it all.

“Just as an experiment, I take a few exploratory pictures. Just around my camp, just to document. But then when I go to pull the roll of film out to develop it, I’d brought all the chemicals & tools, it just pours, *it pours* out the back of the camera. *It’s like there’s nothing but liquid inside this camera, & I just don’t know what to think.*

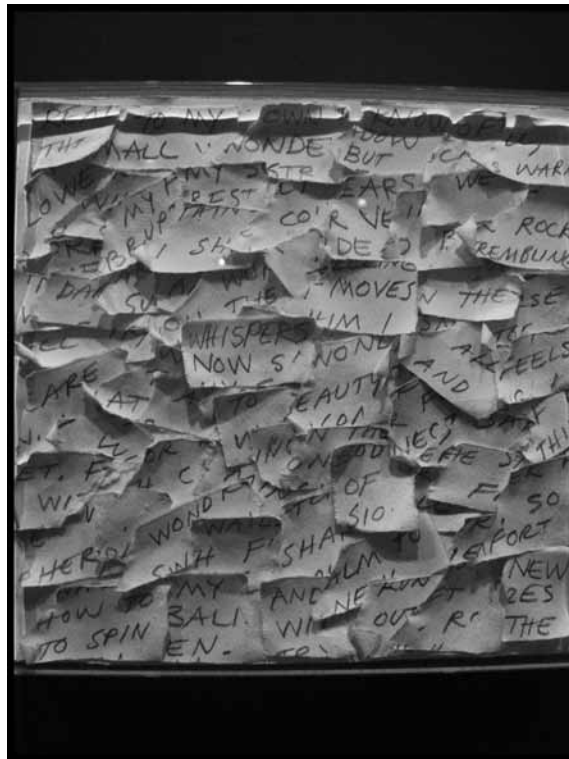
“I came here to find out the truth of the Island, & to document it, I meant no harm, but it seems that, since I’ve arrived, things have gone wrong—& then I remember this peculiar bit of advice I was given along the way, as I told various people of my plans to find this Island.

“One of them was a strange old man with a long beard, I don’t even know why he was in my office. He kind of came in with others that I was discussing the matter with, then suddenly he was looking at me. They’d all left, & he was looking at me, & he was saying, *if you’re gonna survive there, you better learn how to hmmmmmm*

“& until now I hadn’t even thought of this advice, but now I sit down, right where I am, right in the clearing where I am, I just sit right down, knowing it’s all too much for me, too bigger than I am, except that this one piece of advice, & I sit right down here, & I close my eyes, & I *hmmmmmm*

And for just a moment, you are back with me, close, closer than anyone or anything I have ever known, Turquoise Eyes, my Evelyn, Turquoise Eyes, & I hmmmmmm till my breath runs out, and you are gone again, oh my lost heart, you are gone again





Judih Haggai

the day begins
old age and vitality
the usual mix

* * *

body urges brain
it's time! it's time!
pre-dawn antics

* * *

teacher
walks through rooms
turns on lights

* * *

so young
till chance reflection
who's that?

* * *

what we say
a little luck
chance connection

* * *

tiniest flaws
huge gaps in logic
my new glasses

* * *

her biggest heart
no protection from fate
one final morning

* * *

knock on door
ring of landline
strange forms of contact

* * *

squeak of bike brakes
heart leaps at familiar sound
pre-dawn visitor

* * *

the best ideas
clear as a bell
fade before pencil

* * *

mind cleanse
as sleep smoothes the creases
bits fall into place

* * *

orange grove
the birds and I
share the glory

* * * * *



Love in Puerto Rico

[Travel Journal]

Continued from Cenacle | 93 | June 2015

IX.

I'm looking for the fruit trees. Any fruit trees. Everything is jungle or mud, simmering under stagnating saturated heat. Every kind of Gooba-wabba plant is all around, big leaves, verdant greens. I see no avocado trees. No orange trees. No tangerine, grapefruit, or papaya trees. Disheveled banana plantations pass by on the highway, but there are no bananas in the trees. What happened to the Harry Belafonte song about "picka de beeanna . . . daaaay oh"? All I got reciting in my head is "Yes . . . we have no bananas." What refugee from 4th grade English coined that?

I have to slow my car and stretch my head out the window like a dog to try and see any roadside fruit. This produces a serenade of honking, cursing Puerto Ricans trying to pass me. I do notice that there are mango trees. Under each of these trees is a rotting mango mush. The good fruit is too high up to reach, and it's too far gone on the ground. Never really cared for that slimy stuff anyway. Sort of a cantaloupe with a glandular problem. A melon with the daycare flu. The rind is attached like a carp skin to the gook inside. The hell with that crap. At long last, I spy a citrus tree of some sort. I am nearing a mountain pass on the windiest narrow road since Hannibal went over the Alps. Parking at what I perceive to be the edge of the road, I triple-lock the car and scurry back down to the tree. She sits in there pouting, fiddling with the air conditioning controls. I hope she lets me back in.

Pick-ups and sedans tear past at 60 MPH, nearly double the safe driving speed on this paved trail. Their tires shriek as they swerve wildly into the blind curve. I balance on a mangled road barrier and pull a branch down. Small green oranges? Un-ripe tangerines? Green lemons?

I slice one open with the switch-blade I purchased to feel more Puerto Rican. Yes, a clear juice, a tang in the air, citrus for sure. Hmmm . . . green interior. A bite. Limes. A tree of sour puss limes. Not bad, though, in spite of the lack of tequila. A refreshing tart taste. I load a half dozen into my shirt. This will balance my scurvy McDonald's diet.

A massive horn honking is coming down the hill. The berserker apparently has a broken horn. *BBLAAAAAAAAAAAAA. BLAAAAAAAAAAAAA!* A relentless deluge of sound. Accompanying this cacophony is the squealing of tires and minor horns of the cars being run off the road. I cannot see through the curves and trees ahead what the approaching monster is.

Finally, I see it. A fuel-truck that is twice the length of any curve radius. An elephant stampede through an office hallway seems safer. The wild-eyed driver looks less than 16, baseball cap on backwards, teeth clenched in a deathly tetanus grin. He is careening the truck around the corners with one arm, the other working the horn maniacally. I see that my fragile rental car is parked right on the curve, and that the impending doom uses both lanes with ample percentage



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

of the shoulder.

My god, no time to move the car. Should I get in and save the slutty succubus? Sure death. Not a bad plan for me if I do nothing except dive into the banana trees; but then, I didn't get the collision insurance. The fireball promises to be magnificent though.

I run to a spot where I might not be engulfed and cling to a barren banana tree. I am riveted in horror by the mechanical tsunami's approach. At the curve, the driver realizes the impending disaster. He dynamites the breaks with a rendering shriek. A small cumulus cloud billows from the tires.

Then suddenly he's off the brakes and back on the horn. The forty tons are still traveling at 50 into the 20 MPH curve. With skill, he spins the steering wheel, careening the truck across the entire road, and diving into the curve. The paint on the rental car blisters from the air pressure of the near miss.

Then he is past. Stress factor #9 is gone. She still lives. His massive horn recedes down into the valley below, doing the Einstein relative sound shift thing. I pour my puny limes into the back seat and speed the hell out of there, at 60 MPH like the rest, but with the windows down to hear the next truck. She is gaping malevolent hate at me.

"You stupid asshole. You nearly got me killed." *Nearly* is the unfortunate operative word, I think.

"I never told you to stay in the car. You could have gotten out and ran."

"*Ewww*. In this heat?" That's really brilliant. Don't get into a sweat trying to avoid the fireball.

"Don't ever call me stupid," I say with gravity.

"Well, it *waaaaazz*." The nasal tone again. Frequently, it seems. Where the joyous hugging and kissing of having escaped near death? The affirmation that the other is all of life in one's existence? Apparently, only in all those Russian novels I read. Not here in Puerto Rico.

All the crazies on this island are driving on my ass closer than the gap between my balls. No matter what speed I drive, some son-of-a-bitch zooms up behind me, and clamps on like a thigh pimple. The rear view mirror is filled with the pop-eyed intense freaky eye whites. I can't even see their bashed-in car grills. The bastards can't be more than seven inches off my license plate.

I swerve halfway onto the shoulder and the maniac behind me punches it, flying past at 70. No thought to oncoming traffic. That's some other fool's problem. The oncoming cars swerve wildly as the auto-rocket roars up the center line. *What the fuck is the prick's hurry?* There is no business to attend to. There are no appointments. There is only beer. Get to the beer. This is what is important. This is the mission of the Puerto Rican.

The cars streaming by are a trailer park parade from a stock car race. They are all smashed up. Some are "T-boned" into the side doors, but most are diagonally mashed. These cute crunchings appear to be from 15 to 25 MPH impacts. Entire headlight or rear taillight systems are missing, crumpled off to one side like a used baked potato wrapper. There is no attempted repair. The car still works just fine, 0 to 60 in 12 seconds. These scraggly tetanus traps have killed and will kill again.

I am reminded of the bold alley cats that have their ears in ribbons because they won't back down from a snarling, swinging fight. The timid felines all have abscesses on their rump from being slashed while running in fear. The cars to avoid are smashed in front, the *loco gatos*.

Intersections are an anarchist cowboy's dream come true. There are no signals, signs, or

markings. There are no rules. The boldest, beer-driven, horn-honking, accelerating lunatic rules. Courtesy is for wimps. Wimps get smashed sniveling to the side.

Getting into the local flavor of Puerto Rican traffic rules, I find myself at an intersection attempting a left turn. To cross a four-lane intersection, the procedure is to charge out in the fastest, most aggressive, manner possible, braking only at the last possible second before collision, while ignoring oncoming traffic. They got brakes. I hope.

Luckily, I am behind a more brazen maniac operator that hooks his vehicle into the oncoming traffic lane at a rakish diagonal, slowly squeezing the pre-smashed nose of his car into the traffic. As if he's sneaking up on a mouse. This causes the incoming traffic to swerve frantically into the jammed lane to their right, which is speeding by at a bumper-to-bumper 60. His mechanical foreplay is accompanied by commodious honking and fist-waving.

Horror fills the bulging eyes of the oncoming traffic. Tire smoke plumes up. Their hesitation creates a split-second moving hole. I burst ahead, careening the car into the gap. A "T-bone" game of Chicken.

By some miracle of the chaos theory, another hole appears to shoot through in the right lane. Rocketing into the far side street, I hook the sidewalk for a little more maneuvering room, scattering pedestrians who bolt for their lives. I'm through the mousetrap, charging down the side street to the sound of blaring horns behind me. My sniveling passenger has sunk her fingers into the dashboard, and oddly appears to have lost her tan. I'm feeling very Puerto Rican.

X.

Abhh . . . the jungle. A sea of turbulent green. Weird creatures hoot and whistle in the deep of it. The Coquí frog altos its refrain, over and over. It is the beloved mascot of the island. The Coquí is known as a plague pest elsewhere, like in Hawaii (introduced from Puerto Rico in 1988), where it howls all through the night, disturbing the sleep of delicate millionaires.

We have driven up into a park (no signs) and have come to a dead end. It is a dead end because a mudslide, now dried, has gooshed over the pavement, some twenty feet deep. No municipal rush to clear this, it would seem. We stroll the road a few hundred feet before I have to leap into the brush and evacuate. Two different plants attach their sticky Velcro seed pods all over me. So efficient that they cling to my skin like tiny leaches. At first I think they *are* leaches and switchblade scrape the little attachments with a fervor. My brown paint slathers the exotic foliage.

I feel good about bringing dysentery to this island. With any luck, this will wash into the village water system and spread an epidemic of some new virulent strain. Having contracted this from the government lab, there is hope that it is some indestructible genetic mutation, poised to wreak havoc on these people's already miserable lives. Possibly they all have it already. That's why they are so skinny.

I trample a thick patch of 6-foot grass to put up the tent. She does not help. The tent is budget. Tiny. When our blankets are in, it becomes apparent that only I fit in diagonally. She is smaller. She'll have to adapt. Fits her fine by herself, but I'll be damned if it's me who gets ejected. She can stuff into a corner and drape some of those girl parts on me . . . in my dreams.

It is a hundred something degrees. The walls are dripping with condensation, which runs onto the floor, sponging up in the blanket. Night comes suddenly and punctually at 6. Twelve hours to be cooped up in here. A great drawback of the tropics.

Outside the tent, a fog of mosquitoes lurk, attracted by our CO₂. These are minuscule

creatures, about a third the size of a decent mosquito. Fast and mean, they pack a poisonous bite. I am covered in welts from setting up the tent as she cowered in the car. *Dengue fever, dengue fever* keeps going through my mind, like a mantra. No known cure, a lifetime of half-lidded torpor. If it's out there, I got it.

I had envisioned this as a blanket under the tropical stars, toucans calling in the tree-tops, cool air on our naked bodies as we make love in the resonance of nature. But, no, here we are, huddled in an oversized plastic bag, sticky with sweat and microscopic organisms. We are penned in from the ravenous hoard of insects foaming at the proboscis for our blood. A thousand feet below us are the local villagers with their incessant mamba music wafting up to us. Occasional shouts and gunshots. They are drinking, as they are always drinking. But it is night now, so there is justification.

The babe is fetal, holding her knees and rocking back and forth. *What the fuck is with that? Isn't that what the catatonic do?* She is terrified that a carload of these lowland revelers will come up here and rape us to death. She looks raped already.

"We're fine," I assure her, but I get my knife ready to slash the first throat through the tent wall.

Midnight something. The party's still going, on the valley floor. The Coquí frogs continue their weird whistling. I scramble out of the nylon to relieve myself. A huge firefly looms by. As big as a thumb. Looks like a tiny flashlight on a helium balloon, not blinking, rising and falling, casual in its air.

"Hey. Get up, get up. You gotta see this!" I shout to the slumbering princess.

"Uuuhhhh. *What?*" a classic groan.

"It's really cool. A giant firefly."

"Oh."

"Quick. It's moving on."

"*Uuhhoo*. OK." She drags herself to the tent screen. Doing me a favor, she thinks. "Where?"

"Well . . . it's gone now."

"Oh great. Get me up for nothing."

"That was not nothing. You were doing nothing."

"I was trying to sleep! *Ohhhhuuh*." She collapses back into the humid nest.

Pathetic, I think. *How the hell can she be so tired?* We have done nothing except eat off the McDonald's Dollar Menu. The sky is clear out now, the air cooler, the mosquitoes gone off to be frog food. I see the constellations in the stars, all twisted and crumpled from this low latitude angle. *Now* we should go for a walk. Discover the mysteries and wonders of the night. But she's afraid of the dark. Won't go out in it. *What the hell's with that? Aren't you supposed to grow out of that at age 7?*

I'll stay here with her. It sucks to be a gentleman. Besides, I wouldn't want to miss out on the raping. Probably do my asshole some good. I finally fall into an exhausted sleep. She cowers in the three square feet left to her, fitfully imagining all the horrors of the Puerto Rican six o'clock news befalling her.

The morning is cool with a hundred new songs in the forest. A light mist obscures the valley below. The energy of the jungle is humming its music. The locals quiet below. Only the peace of the dripping environment. I want to hike up a creek, be off the trail. Adventure.

"Let's go hike up that creek just next to us. Be fun," I cheerfully suggest.

"Let's not and say we did." Great. Always with some worn-out negative platitude.

"Well . . . why not?"

"Coffee. Need coffee."

"But we're here now. This is the time."

"This is not the time." She's not the movie star now. Her hair is tangled and stringy with sweat. Her skin is a pale fevered pallor. I feel chipper. The gut is unusually quiet.

"*Comme ooon*. A little walk will do you good."

With much cajoling, I guilt-trip her out of the car seat after I have packed up everything. I jump off the road into the dangling lianas, flailing spider webs with a rotten stick. She timidly takes a reluctant step to follow.

Every step is a psychic prodding to get her to follow. A mule moves easier. Now down onto the rocks of the creek bed. They are covered in slime. Impossible to get any traction. Feet dancing like a hockey puck on the smooth stones. A broken bone poised to happen. With the labor of Hercules I get her to follow a few hundred feet. There is a beautiful pool of crystal water. A little waterfall at one end. An overlooked paradise.

"*Oooh*, look, a lobster of some sort," I observe.

It is wild-looking, all striped in reds and blacks and white. About the size of a dinner plate. I rush to capture it with a stick, but it hides under a boulder.

"Did you see it? Did you see it?" I ask excitedly.

"No," she says blandly. Bored in the face of the ecological wonder.

"Hey, let's go for a skinny dip. It will feel good." I'm thinking I can get amorous with her, all clean and fresh in the warm water. Change this stupid animosity around.

"No way!"

"Huh? Why not?"

"There's that crab thing in there."

"He lives there. He's no danger. He's scared out of its little mind. *Comme ooon*. It's refreshing," I say as I splash myself with water.

"No."

"Damn. Kind of a chicken, aren't you?"

"Yes. Chicken." She's not moving anymore. *Bitch*, I think. Took an hour to drag her these few hundred feet. I'd like to continue on for a mile or so. It is obviously impossible. Come 7000 miles and she won't go a few feet. *What a waste of aero-transportation*.

"OK. Let's go then." I am resigned to her selfishness. Pissed, but resigned. Soon back in the safety of the rental. Our one connection with American civilization.

XI.

The jungle falls behind us, tears in my mind to leave my real true love. Back into the maze of crappy housing. Groups of cadaverous men lurk on the street corners, eyeing us like a roast turkey. A few lunge with sinister intent toward the car. Murder is in their eyes, upwelling from their genetic origin of plunderers.

I gun the gas, plunging the car into their scattering skeletons. Running a red light at the street's end to punctuate my escape. She is ashen. Sunk down into the seat so that only her brow clears the dash. Eventually we get tiny coffees at Micky D's. They are the size of water cooler cups. Buck each. She orders four.

"*Ouno. Ouno caafa?*" the bewildered McDonald's teen says.

"Four. I want four, *damn it!* I want a lot of coffee." She holds up four fingers.

"*Abhh . . . quatro caafaa*," I say. The light dawns in the youth like the discovery of DNA.

"Yes. *Quatro. Sí. Gracias*," she emphasizes. This is the most verbose she's been in Spanish since we got here, though I had insisted we learn the language. I might as well have suggested Mongolian.

Another night in the rusting city hotel. I want to go down and join the revelers in the bar below, even though there's a seventy percent chance of getting killed.

"Come on. Let's go get a drink. Dance a little," I entreat.

"No fucking way."

"What the hell is wrong with you? Live a little. You'll never be back here again."

"Thank God!"

"You're just a lazy paranoid liar. A fucking whore just waiting to get back to the asshole and his swimming pool." I am bitter and barbed.

Silence. Which means yes.

"You're too lazy to even argue with me."

"Yes. That's it." *Which one, I wonder?* Both, I suppose. A sweltering naked night of not touching. Such a waste. *The glory that isn't.*

XII.

The next day we run for the airport. The next 72 hours are a confusion over ticket changes, pidgin Spanish, hard seats, bad coffee, public bathrooms, and excessive pouting. Now I'm pouting like a four-year-old. She makes secret cell phone calls to *him*. Setting up the mark for her return. I'm not an idiot . . . she's not so secret. Jealousy is irrelevant now.

Finally, we are back in the USA. Six hours after dropping the suitcases on the floor, she is loading them into the car she stole from *him*, the bald bastard in California. I placidly watch her load the car. Then she is speeding back to *him*.

"Drive unsafe . . . *bitch!*" I call after her.

Who needs no love? The loneliest lonely is being lonely with the one you love. But love is gone. I am sad for what we might have been, a little heartbroken. She drove off to the bald bastard. Now let *him* have the hell. I have purged her from my heart. Purged the love. A mild disgust is all that remains. I released her like the dysentery that purged my guts. Now cured of it. A faint rumbling, a raw rump. The bacteria that she was has gone back to the gutter to infect someone else. No tears here.

But with it all went my dream. The ex-pat dream has been purged. How can I live in an alien land about to be murdered on every street corner? How can I learn Spanish with no one to talk to? What of my love for the jungle, without a love to share it with? Beautiful and deadly, like her. All purged.

Now I am cleansed of gut disease, cleansed of her, cleansed of delusions. I am newborn to my true self, curious, loving, dreaming, hopeful.

And yet I *am* dreaming still . . . the life of love in the tropic jungle.

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Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Eleventh Series

*"Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
how as they pass."*

—The Shins, "For Those to Come," 2003.

i. My Queen Deidre

Her name was Deidre. An old old name
for melancholy, broken-hearted.

But her first expression, once she realized
I hadn't come to take her, willing
or no, wasn't melancholy. Relief?

Curiosity. Confusion. Took my hand,
I'm not thinking at that time to give.
Trained to it. Slaved to it.

But with this man, inclined anyway.
I was busy with the dinner when
they'd rode into camp. Too swamped among
my own terrors to pay mind to more men
in camp. More plates to fill. More appetites.

It was my time, I was told. I was ripe.
Smelling blood between my legs was
enough to alter my status from waiting
to ready.

And I'd been told to be prepared. The men
had been out riding weeks for meat,
for furs, for murder, for fun. Tonight
for some homecoming pillage.

So my thoughts as I went through
my motions of cutting vegetables,
sorting spices, pounding meat already
tender with anguished fists.

Then I left, walking from the cooking
tents to the main path for
horse & foot travel. Joined what
seemed like most of the camp.

They were still on horseback, the six
of them. I felt something. *I felt something.*
For the first time since my lively sensual
blood became an elixir for rage &
brutality, I looked up at him & *felt*
something.

It was the first moment I'd not
obsessed entirely upon the Tangled Gate.
First moment I saw something else
before me. Your blue eyes, sky's,
terrified of something. But not me or mine.

No. Terrified of something more imminent.
& *intimate* than our arrival. Of our
extended embrace of a look, one word:
curiosity. I tried to shake myself
clear. *The Gate. The Gate.*

We'd encountered your camp's men
along our path, & they'd set upon us
with blood & delight. Outnumbered
about fifty to six. We them, really.
Killed none this time. I'd made that
clear from the outset, that first day,
kill only as last choice, to defend yourself
or your brothers.

These were too unskilled & undisciplined
for that. Subdued, mercifully quick,
welcomed us back to their camp as
friends, new allies. Promises of meat,
beds. Women, girls.

These were mean men. Our single glance
amongst ourselves confirmed this.
Another adventure in men-taming
on the circuitous path to the Gate.
Followed them back. Clear with them
on the pain a trap would bring. Wide-eyed, nodded.

We'd done this before. Brought a kind
 of deeper, kinder law to tribes &
 villages unable to do it themselves.
 Become an art of it. *You were something*
else my art could not contain nor comprehend.

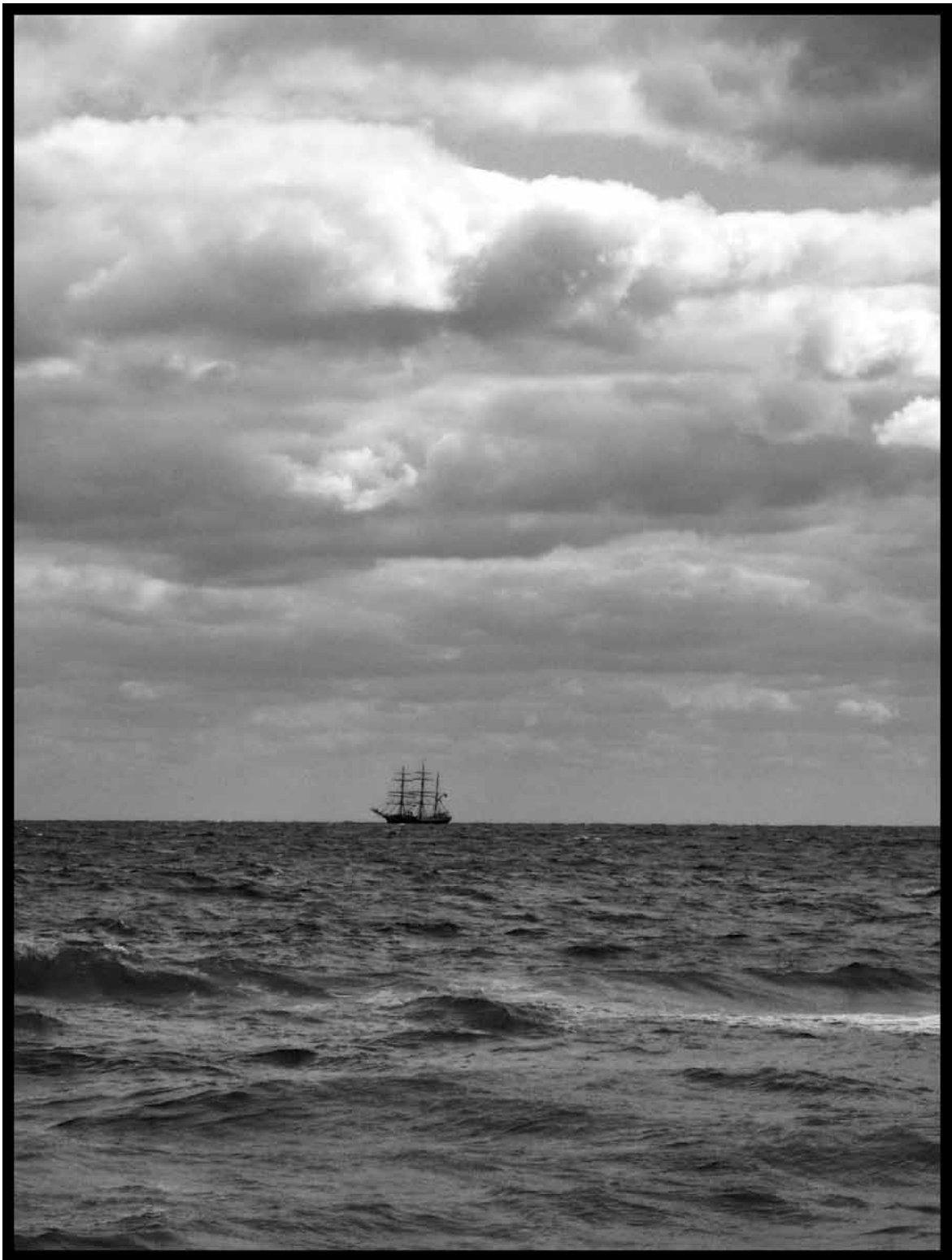
We walked away from the camp
 but I trusted you. Didn't feel the need
 to trust you. *This is what we do,*
from now on. Walk hand in hand
from somewhere to somewhere else.

"What is your name?"
 "My King?"
 He starts. Why had I called him that?
 I barely knew the word. The marauding
 animals who'd ruled us till then would
 bend knee to none among them.
 Catches himself. Smiles. I remember
 his question.

"Deidre?"
 "Deidre?"
 "Yes?"
 "Are you unsure?" Smile mocking, so
 handsome I'll near swoon to it.
 "They named me so."
 "They?"
 "The men of the camp. Said I had
 a melancholy face from when young."

He stops us. Takes my face in his two
 large hands. His eyes are kind &
 sadder in ways not I nor anyone
 in my camp could have known.
 He wasn't sad for himself, or his few
 brothers. *He was sad for us all.*

"You were a foundling."
 "Yes."
 "Where?"
 "By the sea. It's not far."
 He sniffs, nods. Knows.



Walks us along in the night awhile
 in quiet. Looks up at the glittering
 sky. Looks, *searches*. Then back
 down at me, in my glowing girlish
 rags.

With a laugh that nearly drops me,
 he lifts me up, & up, & up,
 till I am sitting atop his great shoulders.

Without a word more, I know he
 wants me to see the stars better,
 watch them with him, by day,
 by night, always watch the stars
 with him.

You wonder why I left, my King.
 I wonder why you left me, Deidre,
 my Queen.

I'll tell you now.

ii. Stars Dark, Woods Bright

*I am dreaming. I am awake.
 I loved the stories, whatever they mean.
 I miss the boy I was years ago.
 I keep along because men are hopeful
 for tomorrow, whatever odds or proof
 stand before them.*

Dreamwalker finds me, tangled in
 a dream I confuse with continuing
 my night; not the one where I
 brought her to her tent, a kiss to
 her cheek, & a smile; & her no longer
 terrified, & this worth more to me
 than everything else. Except. *Except.*

Dreaming that she follows after me
 back to my camp, to my tent,
 that she says without words that
 I must claim her *now, tonight*, or
 her heart lost to me. I look at
 my other self, cramped in this tent
 where usually only one of me, &
 together we begin to undress her slowly.

He mercifully glares her face so I am
 not so heart-strick as he reveals her
 body to be flesh & bones, & then filaments of
 light, & then my crackling eyes opening to
 the morning's quietest hour near dawn.

Oh. *Ahh*. Yes. Dreamwalker. I find my hand
 gripping his still, & tightly. We are
 beneath a pale oak, slightly different angles,
 but I can see his blue-grey eyes, awake,
 no glint, no mock. Not yet.

"Is it her? The one I've dreamt of?"
 He's quiet. "You've decided."
 "Have I? Two of me with her in my tent?"
 Now the mock. A kind I'll give to him
 alone. Give easily.
 "It's been awhile for all of us. Since your . . .
 strictures."

"Maybe I thought it would take two
 of me?" Sharpening my own mock.
 "Maybe it would," he says drily, &
 releases my hand.

The *strictures*. Almost immediately. No smoke.
 No hard drink. No women. Took months
 to allow some kinds of smoke, & our
 brother-sister Asoyadonna's sly soothing hand,
 from time to time.

But the dream, once, overpowering,
 & then dreams of it recurring,
 near as potent. I can never see her eyes,
 her hair too diaphanous for color,
 but her hand, powerful, leading me
 as *truly*, as *inexorably*, as *lightly*,
 as the sun leads the day.

Laughing, laughing, a mouth as elemental
 as spring torrents, leading me,
 leading me, leading me, close, closer,
 closer still, & then arrival, & a sort of
 cease before what now towered over us.

A Gate. *The Tangled Gate*. She motions
 me toward it, begins to fall away,
 both her hands gesturing to it,
 sure, *strick*, sure, & I turn to
 behold it full, & the *Hmming* that's
 been all along in my ears, her voice
 singing to me, fades, fades, braids
 into the welcoming of the Gate—

I hear him standing, finding his familiar
 lean upon his *hekk* stick. It's not a cane,
 not a weapon, more a companion by
 waking, an icon for balance, & a kind
 of pageless tome, a cabinet of night-elixirs
 by dream, a something, *many somethings*.

But it means him away & I remain.
 And the old pang that I have led these
 brothers fruitless all these years. Harder
 than usual, for I've brought us now into
 my old homeland, on good received
 clues, but nonetheless. History's weight
 on me we all share while here.

"We travel light! We bring what we
 need, no more. Our skills, knowledge.
 We are for each other, & what we do
 together!" All that my shout before
 them that first day, names barely yet
 told, hands hardly clasped.

They none of them brought excess
 anyway. Well-worn knapsacks, a few choice
 weapons. These five had not come to me
 as children to teach. Just wanting
 their full pack, their lead dog.

I saw amongst them what bonds forged already.
 The merry light among the painter, Francisco,
 & the one simply called Dreamwalker, & the brother-
 sister, Asoyadonna. The more sober bond between
 the old woodsman, Roddy, & his young companion, Odom.

They look to me, listen to me, this first
 day I'm remembering, & thousands more
 to come when I bear no more authority
 over them than my vision of an Island,
 a Tangled Gate, a promise we can save
 the world.

I owe them this, owe them many
 things, & now you've come too, & I was
 a boy here years ago, listening to the many
 stories Travelers would tell when passing
 through. Watching them forlornly till,
 one day, I left too.

*I loved the stories, whatever they mean.
 I miss that boy I was years ago.*

I walk back to my brothers, that
 near-sleepless morning, my heart
 tendered open ever more old & new,
 vowing I can be what they all need,
 what the world needs. *What you need,*
 Deidre, whatever was that dream
 at the foot of the Gate, whatever the doubts
 mean, old & new. I am hopeful despite.

iii. Hollow Tooth

I have a hollow tooth. It was because of
 a deal I made in a dream with a
coyote. That was the name given
 the tiny spectres that haunted our
 region when I was a boy.

They were trapped there, somehow,
 by the brutish, cruel men who
 tyranted our tribe. Men who had
 years ago ridden into our peaceful
 lands, looking for something powerful.

They'd found it, them, but could not
 figure how to leave with them.
 It slowed them, halted them, &
 enough girls & women to pillage,
 & the living lazy with many fruit trees,
 & the sea nearby. And them unable
 to take the spectres with them away.

They had occupied our lands many
 years by when I began to look around
 at the ways of our lives. I was fed,
 not pressed to work, vaguely content.
 I was a nothing of a boy who followed
 his brothers in chasing through fields;
 building clumsy boats to lose quickly
 in the surf; ranging far sometimes
 into the White Woods to hunt small terrified
 things. I killed nothing but only because
 too slow, because too clumsy.

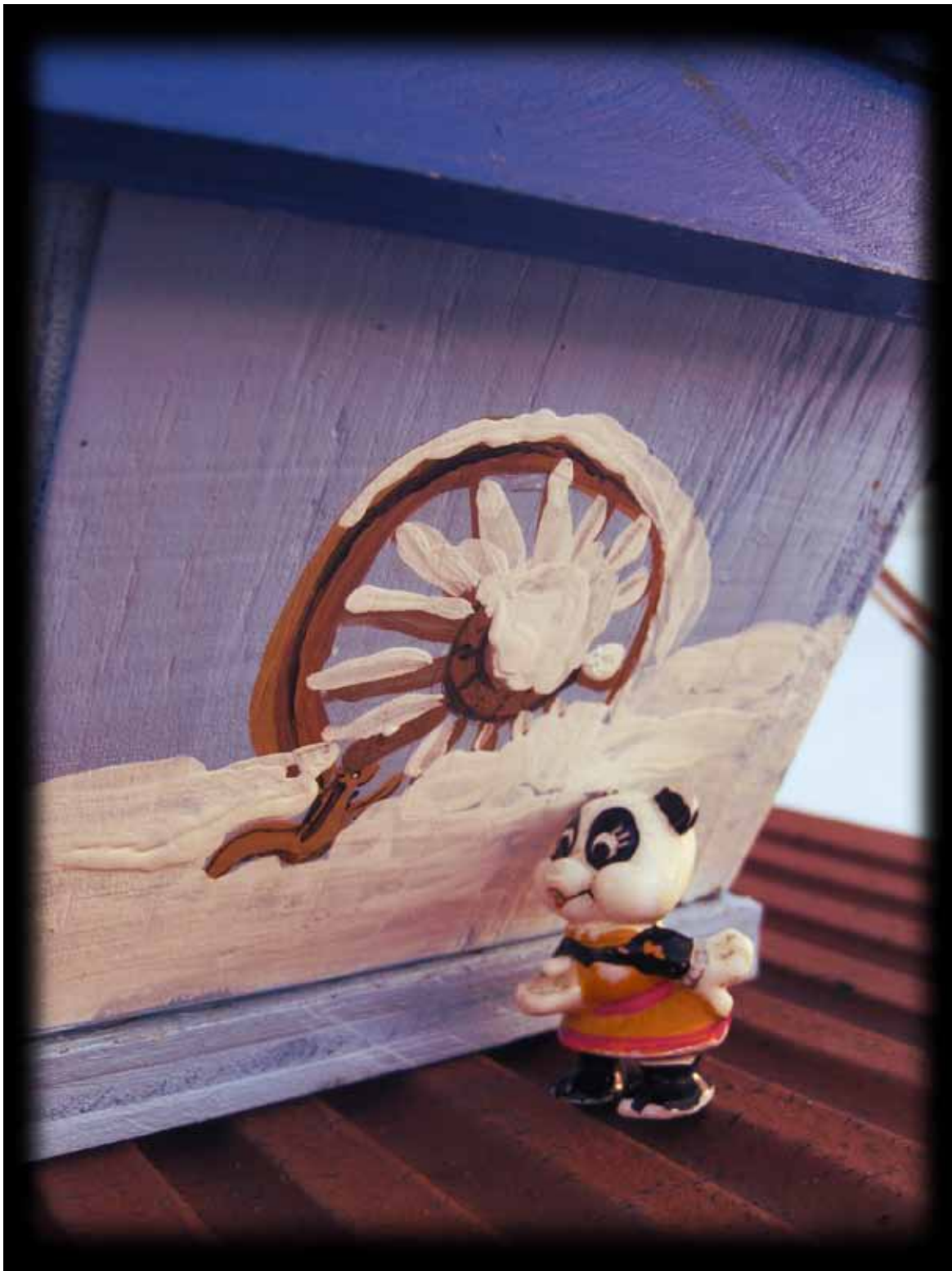
Then something happened in those Woods.
 I became separated from my brothers,
 even their shouts disappeared.
 'Twas afternoon passing, the sky
 dark with thoughts of storm. Listened &
 listened for them. Nothing.

Nothing of a boy, took awhile before
 I panicked. Started running, faster &
 faster, like I could will my way
 home. Stumbled, crashed, ankle
 caught by a root, head flung straight
 into an old trunk. A groan, & still,
 probably hours.

It was dark when I woke, dark &
 very quiet at first. Pain in my ankle,
 ache in my head. Dark & lost.

Looked up. The stars crowded in the sky,
 but each pulsing black to white to black
 to white again. Would have yelled out
 again but my mouth dry.

No fear. Why not? Something I could not
 reckon at first, but my hearing awaked
 that night & I heard the *humming*
 for the first time. *It was coming from*
everywhere. The trees, the grass,
 what hid many from my sight,
the air itself.



My pain fell away. This makes no sense to recall or say. The deeper I listened, the fainter my pain, till it was gone. And I was *humming* too now. Standing, shaky, leaning gently on the trunk, aware of it as a being like me, just differently formed, & us both *humming* with all the rest.

I began to walk, to feel the *Hmmm* guiding me. It was clumsy, awkward, but I listened, & listened, & felt it guide me along, step, another, another, & as my own *humming* joined in, it became easier.

Until the White Woods thinned out & the *humming* seemed to recede back into them.

“Wait! Please!”

There was like a pause. Listening.

“Thank you so much!”

More receding.

“Wait!”

Pause.

“I don’t know who you are, but if I can ever return your kindness, please let me. I will try.”

The *humming* seemed to return to me, press close to my face, my torso, grasp my hands, & then it was gone. And I was slowly walking home an hour or so before daylight.

I told nobody, save that I’d knocked my head, passed out, woke again, & lucked my way out. Told nobody anything that mattered. I’d never had something to myself before.
Kept it.

Now I looked around more, less
 to the whatever wanderings of my
 brothers. I'd had something they hadn't.
 I saw how our girls & women were
 treated, slaves to cook-pots & tents.
 The men who ruled us, unique by their
 long died black & white braids, treated
 our men near to worse.

Sneaked around nights to the tents
 where our slavers would meet
 to conspire. Always talk of the spectres,
 the *coyote*, how to harness & drive
 them on. Take the girls & women, leave
 this cursed region.

Nothing of a boy, or not something
 yet, I wondered how to help these
coyote. Had they helped me that
 night in the White Woods? Who else?

There were old women who lived on the
 edge of our encampment. Nothing good
 said of them. Loathing at a safe distance.

One night after dinner I made my way
 carefully to their tent. They were still
 seated on stumps without it, still
 at their meal.

I approached like nothing of a boy, &
 I doubt they would have told me
 anything, no more than the menfolk
 had told my obscure queries. But
 I stopped, closed my eyes, remembered
 as best I could, & walked up
 to them *hmmming* as we had in
 the Woods. Walked right up
 with all I had to offer for answers.
 Opened my eyes slowly.

They regarded each other & began
 to cackle wildly. One stood &
 bony hand to my shoulder,
 brought me amongst them.

I told them what had happened, that
 strange night, what I had learned since.
 They had me drink bitter tea from
 a stony crag of a mug. As I drank,
 as I talked, their several faces
 seemed to melt into one, smoothed,
 prettied. Wide eyes, laughing smile

Hmmmming. I don't know when it began
 but we were deep in it, & I was
 shown visions of wonderful things.
 The wide wide sea, & eventually
 a green Island with a rocky shore.
 And then a great structure, an arch,
 agelessly old, & within an ancient
 fountain still bubbly young with
 water. Then it receded, this vision,
 & I was back.

My eyes still closed. Silence around
 me. I kept them shut, panicked
 to let all this go.

"Please, how can I help?"
 "Would you leave all you know?"
 "To go there?"
 "Would you leave tonight?"
 "Yes."
 "Would you risk all that you are to save
 your world?"
 "Yes."

I felt a cold metal tool smack into
 my hand. Silence. I opened my eyes.
 Sharp needle's point. For awling into
 rock.

"Your back lower left tooth."
 "I?"
 Silence.

Something of a boy, I slowly, bloodily,
 grinded that tooth to contain a
 cavity within it, big & hid enough to
 shelter something small & precious.

I passed out from the pain. Woke
 with only hints of light in the sky.
 Coughing blood, but alright. I'd done it,
but what passenger?

A cackle emitted within my mouth. Two &
 three more. Playful, delighted,
 like a greeting among new friends.

I was now something of a boy, though
 with nothing to my name as I
 made my tired way toward those
 White Woods, carrying to freedom
 something tiny, merry, & important.

No possessions but a bloody awl, &
 this new friend. Memories of
 the cruelties men will do to possess
 something powerful. A promise
 I had made to somehow save the world.

Would this mean returning here one
 far day? I knew nothing. I *hmmm'd*
 & *hmmm'd*, & my passenger cackled, cackled,
 & joined in.

iv. Apparitions

We'd been traveling together, the six of us,
 a few weeks, no more, camping out,
 encountering noone. I wanted to see
 what we had, what we were.
 What we could be.

I bonded with Dreamwalker first. He accepted
 our task most plainly. Worried my trust
 of him, holding little back from me.
 Watched the others too, sometimes closely,
 seeing waves of mood with the subtlety
 of a heart versed in the hidden.

"We were talking of our path."

"Path?"

He smiles. My evasion is flicked away.

"We have an idea."

It was Asoyadonna's. Visceral loyalty
of a man to his new leader, chosen mission.
Subtler affections that trace womanly
among the bones & sinews.

"There's a village. Not far."
"You've known it?"
"My old home, my liege," dark eyes under long
auburn hair, intimate without flirt.
"Where you were raised?" I correct, slightly.
She nods.

The morning around us is mountain cool,
peaceful as these White Woods get,
& I slow to aware that we are left
alone to talk. *Ahh*.

"They would welcome a visit?"
"Yes. My Aunt. She—" Too eager.
"Tell me. Say it."

She relaxes her back against her tree.
Then stands, finds enough in her
teapot for both of us. Her teas
tingle, *hmmm* very low. We drink.

"When I was younger, she would show
me maps, old maps."
"Of?"
"Islands. And something ancient on
one of them."
"What?"
"She called it the Tangled Gate."
I start. I had used those words with
none of these men.
"You've . . . heard of it?"

So alone for so long, so private to all
that mattered to me, I catch myself
retracting deep. Tug, gently, then harder,
then steady out the words.

"Yes. I think it's what we seek."
She nods. More to say. "We can stay at
the Pensionne. They welcome Travelers,
like us."



Now I smile, like a brother, like a decent man.
 “You’ll like seeing your Aunt again?”
 She nods. What’s left between us
 remains. Dreamwalker’s gift.

The rest unsurprised our destination.
 I wonder again at my wizardry at
 summoning these good brothers, & failure
 at consummating my friendship with
 them. Maybe a bed, better food
 than White Woods grubblings.

We walk half the day to arrive as
 light is fading. This Village seems
 indeed small. In the dusk only the great
 Pensionne, many sided unto shapelessness,
 & a nearby tavern are distinct.

“The Ancienne Coffeehouse is all the name
 it has. Full of friendly carousing folk
 & song. Usually.” A glint in her eyes.

No main entrance to the Pensionne &
 Asoyadonna persists us outside &
 around it instead. Even in the twilight,
 the Gardens are gorgeous. Sniffing,
 to the perfume of happiness itself, of
 every kind of green growing & blooming kind.

Her Aunt is tall, a sober, handsome face,
 dark eyes, long long braid of dark hair,
 a rough simple costume on her well-worked body.

Greets us all warm, a moment with each.
 To young Odom, a kiss on the cheek. “None
 of them know what to make of you yet, eh?”
 To tall Roddy, two hands clasped, “You’ll know
 the true worth of our green friends, now?”
 To dark Francisco the closest embrace.
 “How your women must love to pose
 for that brush!”
 To Dreamwalker, a nod. Then a sort of
 sad, helpless embrace. I wonder. I don’t.
 To me, she kneels. Caught off, I kneel
 in return. Finally, we laugh.

Allows Asoyadonna to take her arm
as we walk not back into the Pensionne
but across to the Ancienne Coffeehouse.

Tis a place that inside seems to run
miles deep, a long busy bar to one wall
that continues room after room.
Leads us to a room off to one side,
dark & warm, cushions for seats,
an ancient stump with its odd game.

We sit. Aunt herself fetches us craggy
tankards of dark drink. The others look
to me, recalling my strictures. I taste,
tis a stronger version of Asoyadonna's
own teas. Stronger *hmmming*. I agree.
I nod.

Aunt reminds me of the old women
of my own youth, & so I know she
has given us the medicine we need.
She trusts her beloved niece with us,
& the intimacy of her secret knowledge.
What Travelers sometimes die than tell.

I relax. Listen to the stories my brothers
tell Aunt. Her face is infinitely kind,
& sad. I feel kinship I have rarely known.
Like Dreamwalker, she leads me back
to these brothers & what they are.

We find ourselves gathered round
the game upon the old stump.
I shake my head a little in this murk
but it seems the pieces on the board
are all alike. Two rows on each side,
facing across two empty ones. Little . . .
black & white pandy bears? Big eyes?
Red & orange dresses? Laughing mouths?
My hollow tooth throbs memory.

Dreamwalker is studying the pieces
closely, *hmmming*, a few words,
"my want for you is enthralled in
my bones," & I feel something
precious is in hands, a homemade
book, like he sings his words as
though someone accompanies, flutes
or strums along. Someone precious
& lost.

I shift my muddled gaze to Asoyadonna,
 hand on Dreamwalker's shoulder,
 close to him as always. She is among
 the pieces on that board, walking
 hand in hand with them, tittering,
 cackling until she comes to a door
 in the board, door down into it,
 pulled back & a staircase descending
 into the earth, come down a hallway,
 a pretty girl met, happy shrills, talk of
 one beautiful boy, & the next. *Precious, lost.*

Uncertain my space & time anymore,
 I reach out my hand & feel the
 solid shoulder of Francisco, we're
 in his studio, he's lecturing a swoon
 of girls, pointing at the face in his
 White Birch picture. Before more, I stand,
 stagger, would collide my way out of
 this room & these visions. *Precious, lost.*

"My King?" Aunt's voice. My eyes closed,
 I lean hunched against a wall.
 "Why do you call me that? I am nobody's
 King!"
 A pause. "We both know you will be."

"I can't lead these men to what we're
 bound to & salve their ills & regrets too!
 I can barely offer just a vision!"

"It's a true vision. They believe you.
 They came. Look!"

Open mine eyes. Roddy & Odom leading
 the laughter, the cackling, with the
 little pandy bears they seem to know well,
 love well. Tossing them back & forth, jaw
 to jaw.

Aunt's hand on my face is now not old, not
 weathered even by loving toil in
 the sun. "Healing is hereon, my love,
 & best sought together. Why else bound
 for the Tangled Gate? How else
 to save this world?"

Aunt's more familiar hand pulls me back
 among my brothers. None of them look
 at me directly until I raise my tankard
 high, a saluting gesture to each one
 in turn, & Aunt lastly.

"Brothers. Tonight & always." Our tankards
 clash together, by twos, by threes, then
 all of us, again & again. Our hostess smiling
 lets her pause as the six of us
 cry & toast on & on.

v. Pensionne Nights

"We are slaves to what we love, & then
 twice twice over to what we love &
 can have no more. Spectres of word & touch
 aul us from within. A happy song,
 a low voice, crickets' hypnotic tunes in a
 forested dusk." Pauses, though she
 keeps walking, leading me somewhere
 in this labyrinthine Pensionne.

Smiles back at me. "Our feet walk on,
 our hearts beat steady inside, our minds
 reach & reach back. A weird whorl of living."

I say nothing. Silence best shows my interest,
 my will to humble & learn while here.

She warns, of past attachments, of new ones
 beyond the six of us, of slowing too long in
 any place.

"The world seeks to settle men, to bind them
 to a place, its land, its people. The world
 does not know it needs saving."

"Are we wrong then? This quest foolish
 in place of a settled life, well-lived?"

She stops us. We're in a murky passageway,
 one of countless. She likes to walk the
 Pensionne at late hours, touching its walls,
 tasting its airs, sniffing where it ripples with
 ease & unrest. Came upon me one night,
 more randomly awake & walking. Now finds
 me every time I so wander.

"What's the filed-out cavity in your back tooth
 for?"
 I don't lie. "A favor."

"Mutilating your jaw?"
 "For passage. Escape. For us both."
 She nods. Knows. Asks to see how much
 I will tell. I choose to answer true.

Does my sleeplessness infect my brothers
 like a malady? More like my uncertainty.
 I don't know why we remain, but we do. I cease
 returning to my room by morning, sleeping
 wherever I sink, always an empty room or
 at least a corner to find. When I sleep at all.

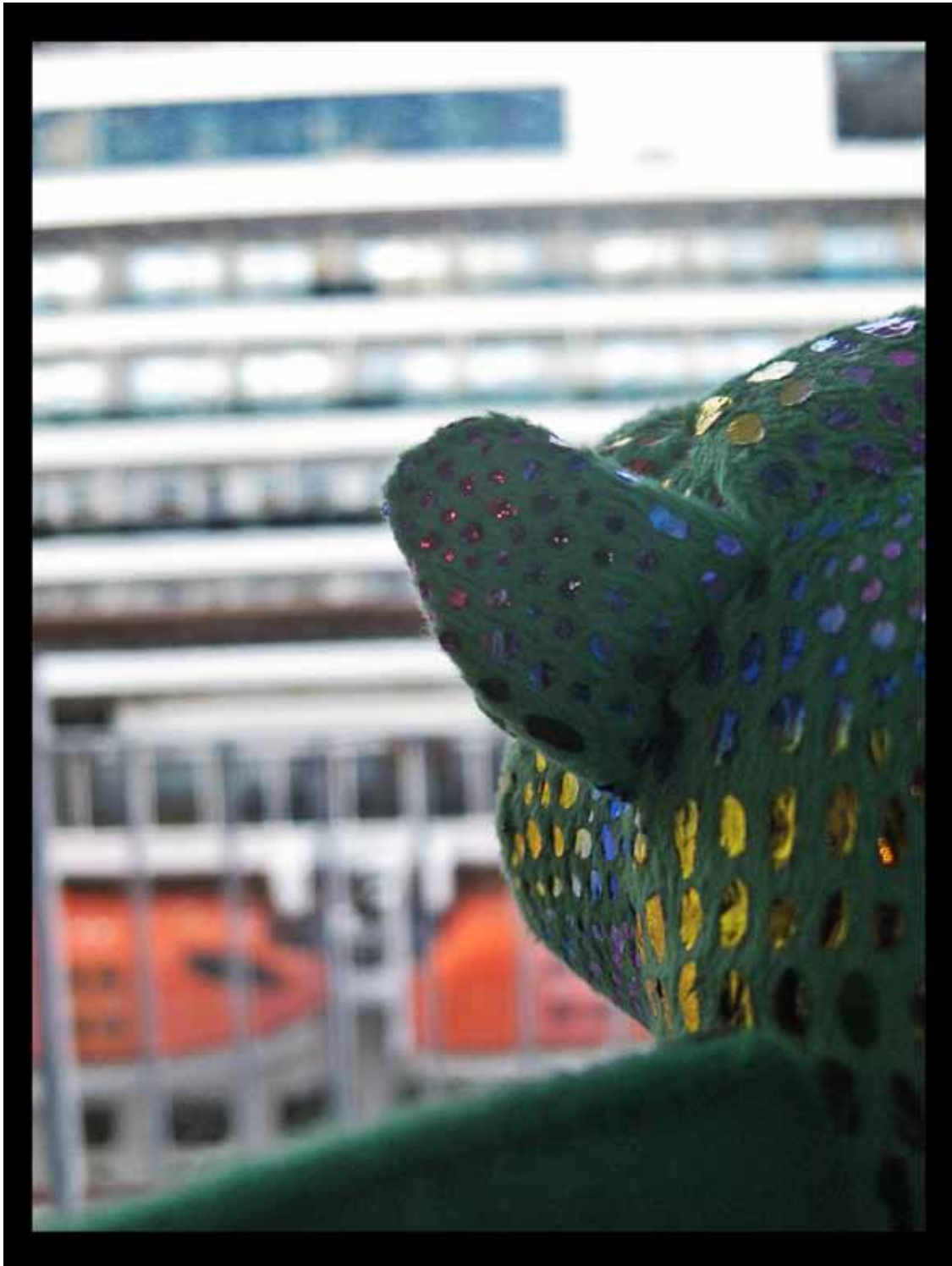
Dreamwalker finds me in the Gardens,
 a full moon revealing my shape in
 the bushes I've settled in. He noiselessly
 joins my perch. Silence between us.

A hand on my shoulder. "Why do you wait
 here, my liege?"
 "Aunt told me a magickal beast roams
 these Gardens some nights."
 "And why do you seek him?"
 I shake my head. I don't know. "Curiosity?"

"He is my friend. Perhaps he will come."
 'Tis Asoyadonna. Does she come folded
 within Dreamwalker's pocket?

Alas, nothing. Just a fool to reck
 before these good persons.

Now I reply, as Aunt & I walk along.
 "What matters, what roots deep & stays,
 is who cares stone sure for you; less so;
 used to be; & the rest who pass you by,
 eyes dull to you, bright to their own.
 Not on their map. Could be. *Not.*



“These brothers, we’re hardly a single thing
 yet, like a scorch too new to reveal a
 pattern or a symbol, yet they matter to me
 & I to them. How? Why? As you said: *They’re here.*
We all came here. Whatever here is.”

We climb along in silence, somehow deeper
 than she’s let me before, stone stairs
 become rocky paths become Woods whose
 warped gravity causes us to tangle among
 vines & clamber hand by hand inches
 above an earth black & white braided.

Aunt lets go ahead of me, falling at
 a weird slant upwards through pale
 trees, toward lights the color of black
 glaring stars. I take a deep breath,
 let go, falling down upwards, the black
 lights careening at me too high
 & low to elude.

Laid out sudden. In my mouth . . . wet sand.
 The air sniffs . . . like the sea? Sounds of breathing
 above. With pain I nod, shakily raise up
 my hand. Mutterings, more hands than
 needed lift me up. All of them. No Aunt.

Asoyadonna smiles my attention. “Aunt’s
 better at gifts than goodbyes.” Points me
 to what lays moored in the shallows.

A boat. A *great, beautiful boat. Our boat.*
 I say it aloud, to all of them, & awed
 happy, “*Our boat.*”
 They nod, laugh, break from being the
 concerned group around me to the
 resumed tasks of loading what we have
 into a long boat. I see my things
 among the rest. *We’re not going back.*

“Thank you, Aunt,” I say, again aloud.
 They pause, all of them, catch this,
 nod, laugh.

I tell you this story, Deidre, that first
 night we finally stayed together in my
 tent. My claim for you made that night
 before all your camp, the men included.
 Several coveted your high breasts, fine ass,
 trainable looking lips, but none to oppose me.
I loved you. I had a group of brothers who'd
 humiliated your brauny numbers.

After the first time, too quick & excited,
 & the later, slower, second time, we lay
 together naked, clung wetly, & I told you
 what I could of who I was & why.

"The boat changed me."

"How?"

I shake my head. "It was a home.

No longer refugees with bloated ideals."

"But where is it now?"

"Not far. Safe."

Something passes across your face.
 A fear. Then resignation? Then gone,
 your mischievous smile partnering your hand
 on my new-hardening cock. Your love again
 to be eaten, licked, chewed wide open.

vi. The Path of General Warmth

I was long in my travels of those
 White Woods, alone, often near
 to starving, & my proof of a world
 beyond my immediate one of
 privation in the form of an occasional
 cackle burst from my mouth, but
 not from my throat.

I skill enough to survive, retch
 at many tries for food, but nothing
 poisons me outright. Takes me awhile
 to realize the cackles are advice,
 nearing me toward edibles, water, safe
 shelters to sleep. I respond by *hmming*
 more, trying this strange tongue's capacities.

More often feel watched as I hike
 along. Small Creatures trail me, allow
 me glimpses but no more. I try *hmmming*
 toward them, but it is a clumsy
 man's fool incoherence, nothing as light
 & swift as their music.

The one in my jaw seems to understand,
 after her merry fashion. As I hike along,
 pathlessly, she joins in my *hmmming*
 more deeply, threads through it,
braids us together, & so this crooning
 more comforts, calls to her fellow
 Creatures. Nearer, my friends, *nearer*.

I find myself more rarely sleeping, often
 just a few hours before light, a few
 intense hours to maintain my body,
 some brush & branches to cover my
 torso slumped against a trunk.

I awake, shivering. *Cold*. The Creatures
 in my arms are shivering too, huddling
 close to my chest for comfort. These
 magickal beings? Frigid & so helpless
 to trust my strange man's grasp?

A cackle in my jaw, something else.
They were warming me too. This beautiful
 White Bunny, this soft grey Hedgehog,
 these small pretty Giraffes, the many more
 I would hold. *They were cold*. I was to help?

I didn't know how. The cold was winter,
 & it would stay. I thought to build
 shelter but these Creatures of the Woods
 were not pets, living tamely by firesides.
 I needed an answer that belonged to them.

We *hmmm'd* together, for hours & hours,
 I let the voice in my jaw, & my own,
 & these many other Creatures join
 deeper, braid deeper together, seeking
 in this world, in these White Woods,
 the warmth they needed. A General
 Warmth for all?

By light, & well into the night,
 we moved fast, traveling deeper &
 deeper into these Woods. They grew no
 warmer though there were more
 & more Creatures traveling with us.

“What is it? What am I seeking?”
 What am I missing?”

Cackle. Cackle.

“How do I help them? We move
 till exhausted, till we fall together,
 or they slow for me.”

Cackle-cackle.

“These Woods endure. They endure!
 Roots deep in the earth, they warm
 to the world’s deep heart, & endure.”

Cackle-cackle?

“We have no such roots as plants & trees.
 We move upon the earth, not rooted
 deep to it.”

Cackle. Cackle. Cackle.

“Roots,” I say slowly. “Roots seek the warmth.
 Roots supplicate it. World asked, world gives.”

It’s still dark when I try this, & more
 Creatures than I can reckon are huddled
 around me. I think: *if we are of
 this world, belong to it, then we must
 ask of it our wish.*

I say aloud, leaning upon that tree
 in the drifting darkness, “Cold. Cold.
 Cold.” Something. *Something.* I gesture
 to my shivering companions. “Cold.
 Cold. Cold.” Something. *Something warm.*
 My friends are warmer.

I think it because these White Woods.
 I think it because these magickal Creatures.
 I think it because the merry spectre
 traveling in my jaw.

I don’t know.

I teach these Creatures the word
 “cold” of my rude men’s tongue.
 I conjure a communication.

“Tap your hearts, little Creatures, three times,
 & say or think, ‘cold, cold, cold.’
 Tap the tree near you, or the earth under
 your paws, & say or think, ‘cold, cold, cold.’”

It becomes the Path of General Warmth.
 I wonder if it is truly my gift to
 these Creatures; how would I know &
 not them?

I never know. The spring comes again,
 in its time. The Creatures have adopted
 me for my kindnesses, long forgotten
 I am a man, to be feared, to be fled.

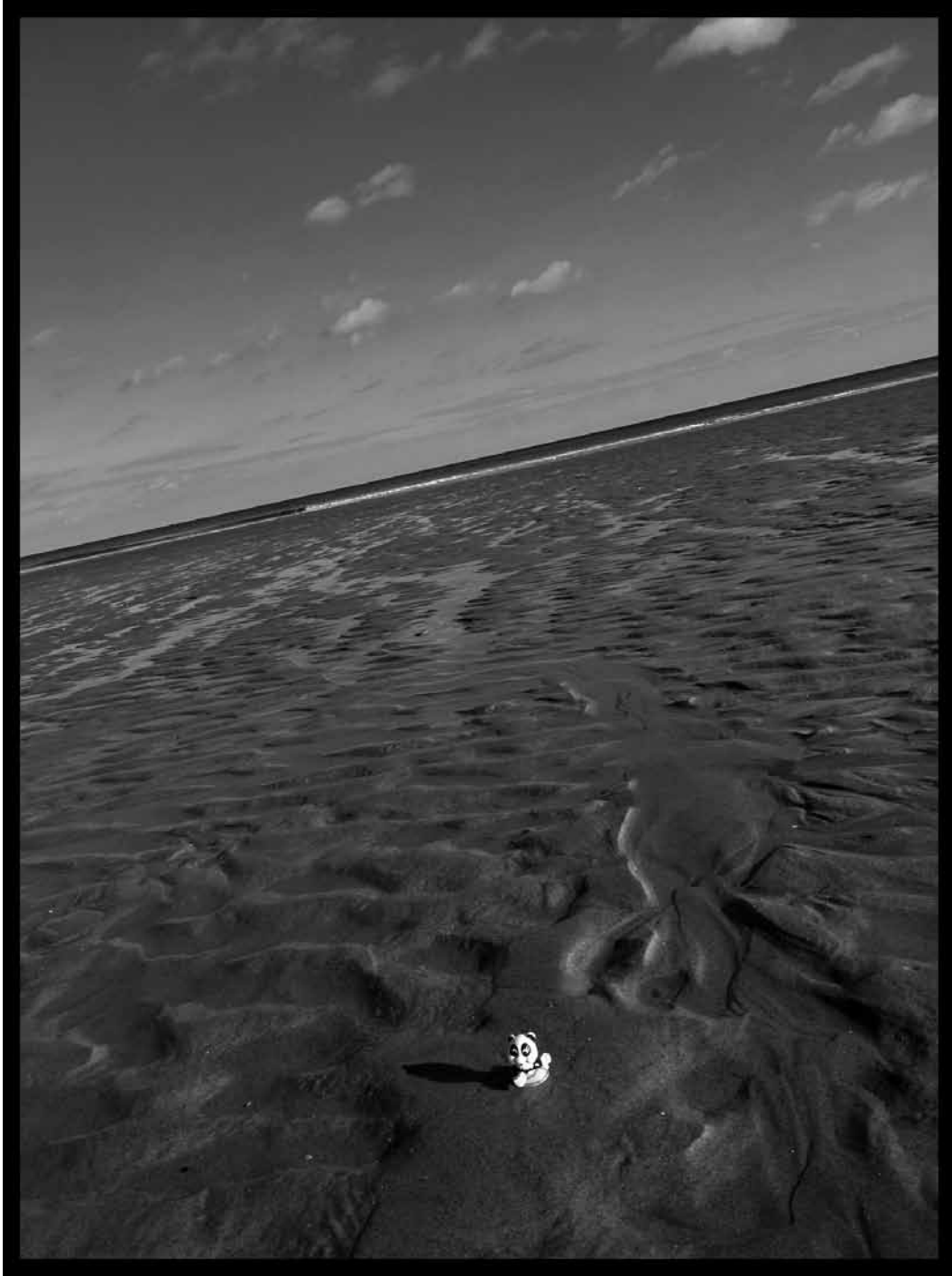
Even tonight, this first night on our ship,
 already far far from land, I feel
 the White Woods not so far, the *hmmm*
 of my friends still braids my heart,
 my roots extend back there, & yearn
 toward the solid earth we will
 know again.

Why did you leave me, little friend?
Why did you leave me?

vii. What the King Told

My brothers wanted to know what we
 sought, why, what we would do at
 our journey’s end. I told what I had
 learned in the years before I found them.
 It became a skein of myths we shared,
 lured by their power, repulsed by
 their fantastical qualities.

That first day we met by that river, neath that
 great bridge, them looking still newly upon each other,
 & upon me. We’d told our travels, struggles,
 how we’d started to find each other,
 how we felt like brothers from our
 meetings. As evening came, I knew
 they wanted more from me, bigger.



I stood up, motioned them to seat
 on the rocks & fallen trunks around
 us. The wilds around us quiet,
 listening to us too, or finding us
 of no consequence, settling to their dozing.

“There is no one solid story of men &
 their origins, though countless those
 you will meet with a claim to the truth,”
 I begin. They nod. Their faces still new
 & strange to me, I feel like my claim
 to make is what I say right now.

“I was shown, as a young man, wondrous
 visions of an Island, & upon it a
 great structure, a Gate, impossibly
 massive & old. Within it, a Fountain,
 equally ageless. Paths further in,
 countless, perhaps the truths we seek
 to be found there.”

Roddy & Odom scrape up wood for
 a fire. They’ve done this many times,
 practiced moves, familiar, affectionate.
 Listening to me all the while, the fire
 as much to warm our story as our
 later dinner.

“My travels took me to far & strange
 lands, where mention of this Gate
 caused my hosts to tell their own
 stories.”

“They trusted you because you were seeking
 far for truths,” says Dreamwalker quietly.
 “They told me because someone had to gather
 them together,” I counter. “I shared
 what I had been told, & received more.”
 I pause, thinking. “I couldn’t confuse
 my worth in collecting the stories with
 the stories themselves.”

There’s stew. We eat quietly. I will it
 by my own silence. A sweet-smoked pipe
 goes around. Eventually I speak again
 as the stars roll in waves over the sky.

“There are many worlds with Gates
like ours, wherefrom life is said to
emanate. Where raw materials of rock & fire
& water ignite into growing life.”

“And men on each of these?” asks
Asoyadonna softly. Her voice enthralls
me already, something in it. *Something*.

“No. Some worlds never grow up men
on their lands. Those that do seem to have come
from a crisis on the first world of men.”

“Which is not ours?” asks young Odom.
Wide-eyed as I was when first I heard
these stories. Till I heard their like over &
over again.

“No. We are but one of numbers. The first world
was dying & sent out a very few in many
directions, attracted by the distant beacons
of the Gates, to arrive where men might
flourish anew. Each a fresh chance.”

I stopped. Enough for that first night.
I knew they had all heard some of
these stories too. But there was more
I would tell over time, & realize
none knew quite as much as me. I told &
when they asked, I told again.

“The Gate bonds with its world &
what emerges fills its seas, its skies, its lands.”

“Why doesn’t this naturally include men?”

“Perhaps it does, in some forms, on
some worlds. But not ours, nor many
like ours.”

“What do we seek on this Island,
within this Gate?”

“A Beast. Deep in a cave.”

“Why?”

“For help.”

“What kind?”

Each asked me this, but I did not know.
 The Beast seemed the surest yet obscurest story
 of all. Even my Creature friends would
 neither tell nor quiet silence. They'd turn
 from me, sniffing & sniffing.

I kept to myself, I can't say why for
 sure, that that far away home world
 of men had also sent an arbiter
 for each of its new worlds. Able to judge, nay
 or yea, the experiment. I'd been told
 this was for me alone, even among
 the brothers I would find & travel
 years with.

I was told I would know her, would love
 her uniquely among all men. I was told
 it was not the travels with my brothers
 would be my final test, but how I fared
 by her.

Told in dreams—told in deep, *hmmmming*
 drinks—told by those resembling my
 Creature friends—told by those whose forms
 I could not reck nor remember—told
 what I had to do—told not *how*—
 told these brothers I met that day
 by that river would help, suffer for me & help.

I just knew, all those years, that you & I
 bound for each other, & you my chance
 to save this beautiful world

viii. Wide Wide Sea

We traveled many places, my love,
 before the day we rode into my
 old homeland & I first saw you.
 We traveled the wide wide sea for many
 years, it seemed, with many ports of call.

Some a day or two, for supplies, &
 a stomp upon dry land. Some we
 lingered, tempted not to return to voyage.
 We loved each other, we cherished our
 mission, yet tempted, not often,
 but often enough. *Depart the cage.*

I wanted proof, for the others, for myself,
 that what we did was *needed & right*.
 Wanted someone to show us, together,
 the demise of the world without us.
 I sometimes felt far from those magickal
 Creatures in those strange Woods.

They insisted I take the captain's cabin,
 bigger than the rest, to myself. My few
 books & possessions, clothes, not enough
 to fill its spaces. Its bed stiff, not very
 much to my liking. Better than the ground.
 Just four walls, a floor. A ceiling too, &
 there where my adventures began.

A shaft of light, I discovered, ran from
 the sky itself through the deck & down
 to where I lay unresting one day long
 out at sea. The size of a small coin
 at best & yet how? At night too, my narrow
 view of stars. How did it come?

And yet no more than this for many
 months longer. Until one night
 I lay abed staring up its length, letting
 myself believe I really could see
 the night's sky. A shadow crossed
 this darkness, back & forth, again
 & again. And a sound. What? Listened.
Thwup! Thwup! Thwup!

Strained ears, eyes, mind to know
 better, discern what this shadow.
 Then a thought. A gift from Asoyadonna
 months back. Small grey sack of earth
 Creatures. For her teas. Said, smilingly,
 "You should drink more often."

Feeling surely a fool, I found this
 sack & made my fool's way to the
 galley to brew my tea. And return
 to my cabin unencountered. And sit
 at my table, sipping my hot tea.
 And wonder that my great dreams &
 visions seem to remain on this chance.

Returning to my bed, buzzing with tea,
hmmmming for sure, I try something
 new. Keeping my eyes closed, I look
 up toward the shaft of stars. Still
hmmmming, for comfort, I listen too,
 let myself ride up the shaft of night,
 fail to resist its steady-on pull,
 throbbing with my *hmmm*, braiding us.

Thwup! Thwup! Thwup! I rise & rise
 until sure I must be above the boat,
 ascending the skies themselves somehow.
 The steady sound nearing me. *Nearing*.
 Then something shiny up there, close
 & closer until I am hiding my face
 from our collision. But we don't.

I feel paused, slowed, uncertain how one
 navigates this vision, if vision be.
 Finally I think of my breathing &, remembered,
 it resumes. Find as I slow it, steady it,
 my travel slows, steadies. Harder breathing,
 or my previous panic, accelerates it.

Something. *Someone*. I don't seem to have
 words to speak so I conjure an image,
 open hands, a friendly smile, curious
 eyes. By way of hopeful greeting.

Startles me anyway when I receive
 one in return. A great Beast? Winged?
 Green scales, metallically shiny. Large,
 soft, intelligent, *kind* eyes. Like a kind
 of Sea Dragon, I guess. *Thwup!* the sound
 of his wings in the night sky.

I tried to widen my breath, let my
 form fill out more, my hands,
 my torso, feet & arms, legs & face.
 I begin to feel the cold of night
 upon me, & the winds are throwing
 me around when he comes closer,
 catches me up & upon his great head.

No words still so I rise up a smile
 in my mind. This . . . is it one?
 yes . . . this great *Creature* is gentle
 yet more impossibly large & powerful
 than I can imagine.

He loves to fly with me. Skimming
the waves close enough to rain
my face laughing. Then up & up,
& I swear up & up till our world
one more sweet speck among many.

Never a word between us, yet he is
always ready when I call for him.
When the tea is drunk, when I need
to be sure that what we seek
must be found, that what we do
must be done.

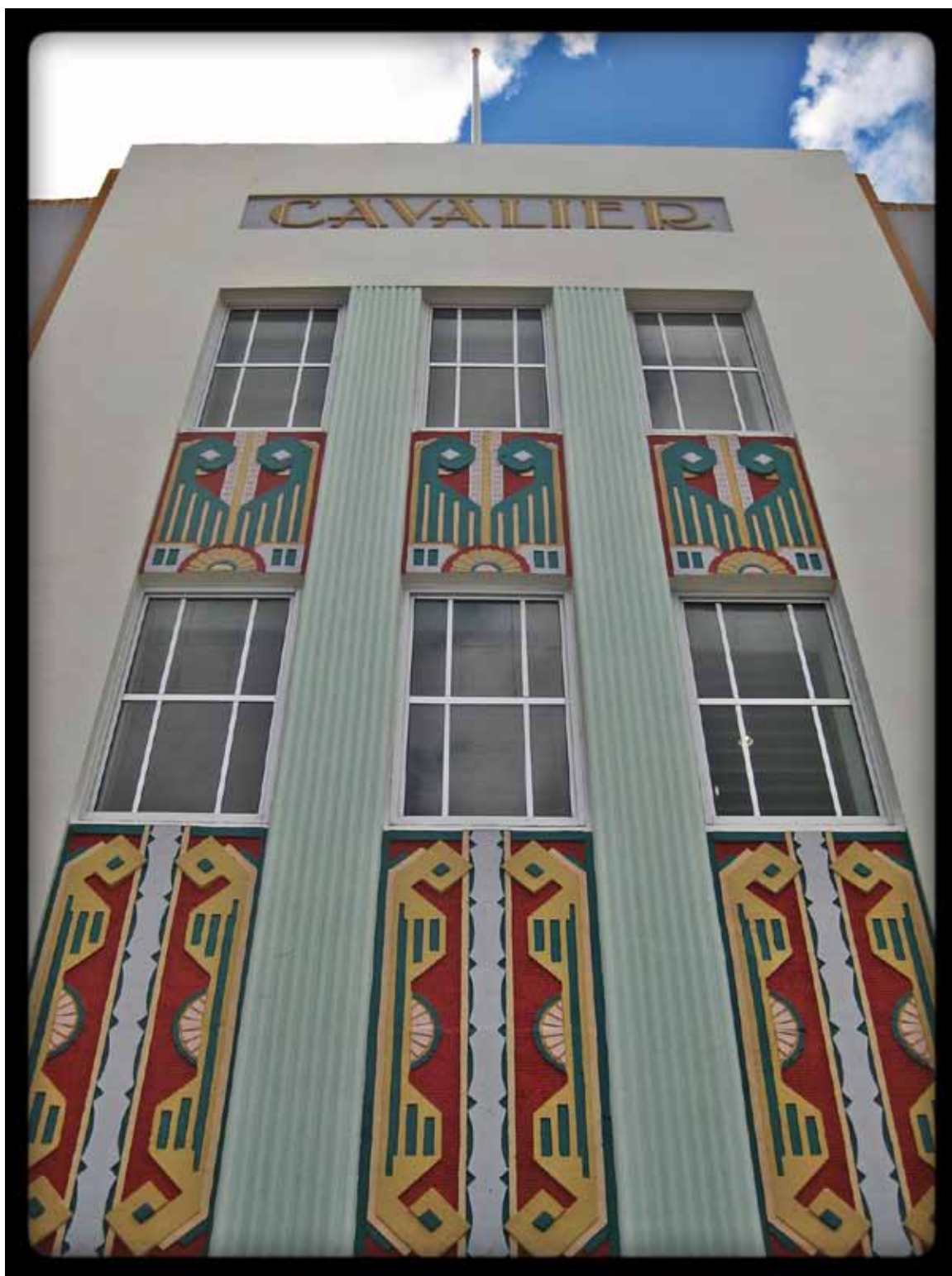
I don't tell my brothers of him.
Not distrust. Not selfishness. Because
another gift the world intends me keep
close. Remind me I am as *apart*
as *a part*. That the world gifts each
of us uniquely, & ours to find the grooves
where we fit.

I wake that next morning, more up
than I've been. More present, eyes hungry,
stomach a smiling maw. Share our
breakfast on the windy deck as
not in awhile. Each of their faces
beautiful, open to me, as open as
my secret night friend's was. *Alike*.
Skimming waters. Skirting stars.



* * * * *





*Miami, Florida
February 2016*







Howard Zinn


Violence and Human Nature

[Classic Essay]

From Declarations of Independence (HarperCollins, 1990).

i.

I remember three different incidents of violence in three different parts of my life. In two of them I was an observer, in one a perpetrator.

In the fall of 1963 I was in Selma, Alabama, and saw two young black civil rights workers clubbed to the ground by state troopers, and then attacked with electric prods, because they tried to bring food and water to black people standing in line waiting to register to vote.

As a twenty-two-year-old Air Force bombardier, I flew a bombing mission in the last weeks of World War II, which can only be considered an atrocity. It was the napalm bombing of a small French village, for purposes that had nothing to do with winning the war, leaving a wasteland of death and destruction five miles below our planes.

Years before that, while a teenager on the streets of Brooklyn, I watched a black man in an argument with an old Jewish man, a pushcart peddler who seemed to be his employer. It was an argument over money the black man claimed he was owed, and he seemed desperate, by turns pleading and threatening, but the older man remained adamant. Suddenly the black man picked up a board and hit the other over the head. The older man, blood trickling down his face, just kept pushing his cart down the street.

I have never been persuaded that such violence, whether of an angry black man or a hate-filled trooper or of a dutiful Air Force officer, was the result of some natural instinct. All of those incidents, as I thought about them later, were explainable by social circumstances. I am in total agreement with the statement of the nineteenth-century English philosopher John Stuart Mill: "Of all the vulgar modes of escaping from the consideration of the effect of social and moral influences upon the human mind, the most vulgar is that of attributing the diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural differences."

Yet, at an early point in any discussion of human violence, especially a discussion of the causes of war, someone will say, "It's human nature." There is ancient, weighty intellectual support for that common argument. Machiavelli, in *The Prince*, expresses confidently his own view of human nature, that human beings tend to be bad. This gives him a good reason, being "realistic," to urge laying aside moral scruples in dealing with people: "A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good. Therefore it is necessary for a prince, who wishes to maintain himself, to learn how not to be good."

The seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes said, "I put forth a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceaseth only in death." This view of human nature led Hobbes to favor any kind of government,

however authoritarian, that would keep the peace by blocking what he thought was the natural inclination of people to do violence to one another. He talked about “the dissolute condition of masterless men” that required “a coercive power to tie their hands from rapine and revenge.”

Beliefs about human nature thus become self-fulfilling prophecies. If you believe human beings are naturally violent and bad, you may be persuaded to think (although not required to think) that it is “realistic” to be that way yourself. But is it indeed realistic (meaning, “I regret this, but it’s a fact . . .”) to blame war on human nature?

ii.

In 1932, Albert Einstein, already world famous for his work in physics and mathematics, wrote a letter to another distinguished thinker, Sigmund Freud. Einstein was deeply troubled by the memory of World War I, which had ended only fourteen years before. Ten million men had died on the battlefields of Europe, for reasons that no one could logically explain. Like many others who had lived through that war, Einstein was horrified by the thought that human life could be destroyed on such a massive scale and worried that there might be another war. He considered that Freud, the world’s leading psychologist, might throw light on the question: *Why do men make war?*

“Dear Professor Freud,” he wrote. “Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war?” Einstein spoke of “that small but determined group, active in every nation, composed of individuals who . . . regard warfare, the manufacture and sale of arms, simply as an occasion to advance their personal interests and enlarge their personal authority.” And then he asked: “How is it possible for this small clique to bend the will of the majority, who stand to lose and suffer by a state of war, to the service of their ambitions?”

Einstein volunteered an answer: “Because man has within him a lust for hatred and destruction.” And then he put his final question to Freud: “Is it possible to control man’s mental evolution so as to make him proof against the psychoses of hate and destructiveness?”

Freud responded: “You surmise that man has in him an active instinct for hatred and destruction, amenable to such stimulations. I entirely agree with you The most casual glance at world-history will show an unending series of conflicts between one community and another.” Freud pointed to two fundamental instincts in human beings: the erotic, or love, instinct, and its opposite, the destructive instinct. But the only hope he could hold for the erotic triumphing over the destructive was in the cultural development of the human race, including “a strengthening of the intellect, which tends to master our instinctive life.”

Einstein had a different view of the value of intelligence in mastering the instincts. After pointing to “the psychoses of hate and destructiveness,” Einstein concluded: “Experience proves that it is rather the so-called ‘Intelligentsia’ that is most apt to yield to these disastrous collective suggestions.”

Here are two of the greatest minds of the century, helpless and frustrated before the persistence of war. Einstein, venturing that aggressive instincts are at the root of war, asks Freud, the expert on instincts, for help in coming to a solution. Note, however, that Einstein has jumped from “man has within him a lust” to “disastrous collective suggestions.” Freud ignores this leap from instinct to culture and affirms that the “destructive instinct” is the crucial cause of war.

But what is Freud’s evidence for the existence of such an instinct? There is something

curious in his argument. He offers no proof from the field of his expertise, psychology. His evidence is in “the most casual glance at world-history.”

Let’s move the discussion forward, fifty years later, to a school of thought that did not exist in Freud’s time, sociobiology. The leading spokesperson in this group is E.O. Wilson, a Harvard University professor and distinguished scientist. His book *Sociobiology* is an impressive treatise on the behavior of various species in the biological world that have social inclinations, like ants and bees.

In the last chapter of *Sociobiology*, Wilson turned to human beings, and this drew so much attention that he decided to write a whole book dealing with this subject: *On Human Nature*. In it there is a chapter on aggression. It starts off with the question: “Are human beings innately aggressive?” Two sentences later: “The answer to it is yes.” (No hesitation here.) And the next sentence explains why: “Throughout history, warfare, representing only the most organized technique of aggression, has been endemic to every form of society, from hunter-gatherer bands to industrial states.”

Here is a peculiar situation. The psychologist (Freud) finds his evidence for the aggressive instinct not in psychology but in history. The biologist (Wilson) finds his evidence not in biology but in history.

This suggests that the evidence from neither psychology nor biology is sufficient to back up the claim for an aggressive instinct, and so these important thinkers turn to history. In this respect, they are no different from the ordinary person, whose thinking follows the same logic: history is full of warfare; one cannot find an era free of it; this must mean that it comes out of something deep in human nature, something biological, a drive, an instinct for violent aggression.

This logic is widespread in modern thought, in all classes of people, whether highly educated or uneducated. And yet, it is almost certainly wrong. And furthermore, it’s dangerous.

Wrong, because there is no real evidence for it. Not in genetics, not in zoology, not in psychology, not in anthropology, not in history, not even in the ordinary experience of soldiers in war. Dangerous because it deflects attention from the non-biological causes of violence and war.

It turns out, however, that Wilson’s firm assent to the idea that human beings are “innately aggressive” depends on his redefinitions of “innately” and “aggressive.” In *On Human Nature*, he says: “Innateness refers to the measurable probability that a trait will develop in a specified set of environments By this criterion human beings have a marked hereditary predisposition to aggressive behavior.” And the word “aggression” takes in a variety of human actions, only some of which are violent.

In other words, when Wilson speaks of people being “innately aggressive” he does not mean that we are all born with an irresistible drive to become violent—it depends on our environment. And even if we become aggressive, that need not take the form of violence. Indeed, Wilson says that “the more violent forms of human aggression are not the manifestations of inborn drives.” We now have, he says, “a more subtle explanation based on the interaction of genetic potential and learning.”

The phrase “genetic potential” gets us closer to a common ground between Wilson and his radical critics, who have attributed to him sometimes more extreme views about innate aggression that he really holds. That is, human beings certainly have, from the start (genetically) a potential for violence, but also a potential for peacefulness. That leaves us open to all sorts of



Courtesy of *Norwegian Sky* Art Gallery

possibilities, depending on the circumstances we find ourselves in, and the circumstances we create for ourselves.

There is no known gene for aggression. Indeed, there is no known gene for any of the common forms of human behavior (I am allowing the possibility that a genetic defect of the brain might make a person violent, but the very fact that it is a defect means it is not a normal trait). The science of genetics, the study of that hereditary material carried in the forty-odd chromosomes in every human cell and transmitted from one generation to the next, knows a good deal about genes for physical characteristics, very little about genes for mental ability, and virtually nothing about genes for personality traits (violence, competitiveness, kindness, surliness, a sense of humor, etc.).

Wilson's colleague at Harvard, scientist Stephen Jay Gould, a specialist in evolution, says very flatly (in *Natural History Magazine*, 1976): "What is the direct evidence for genetic control of specific human social behavior? At the moment, the answer is none whatever."

The distinguished biologist P.W. Medawar puts it this way: "By far the most important characteristic of human beings is that we have and exercise moral judgment and are not at the mercy of our hormones and genes."

In the spring of 1986, an international conference of scientists in Seville, Spain, issued a statement on the question of human nature and violent aggression, concluding: "It is scientifically incorrect to say that war is caused by 'instinct' or any single motivation Modern war involves institutional use of personal characteristics such as obedience, suggestibility, and idealism We conclude that biology does not condemn humanity to war."

What about the evidence of psychology? This is not as "hard" a science as genetics. Geneticists can examine genes, even "splice" them into new forms. What psychologists do is look at the way people behave and think, test them, psychoanalyze them, conduct experiments to see how people react to different experiences, and try to come to reasonable conclusions about why people behave the way they do. There is nothing in the findings of psychologists to make any convincing argument for an instinct for the violent aggressiveness of war. That's why Freud, the founder of modern psychology, had to look for evidence of the destructive instinct in history.

There was a famous "Milgram experiment" at Yale in the 1960s, named after the psychologist who supervised it. A group of paid volunteers were told they were helping with an experiment dealing with the effects of punishment on learning. Each volunteer was seated in a position to observe someone taking a test, wearing electrodes connected to a control panel operated by the volunteer. The volunteer was told to monitor the test and, whenever a wrong answer was given, to pull a switch that would give a painful electrical jolt to the person taking the test, each wrong answer leading to a greater and greater electrical charge. There were thirty switches, with labels ranging from "Slight Shock" to "Danger—Severe Shock."

The volunteer was not told, however, that the person taking the test was an actor and that no real jolt was given. The actor would pretend to be in pain when the volunteer pulled the switch. When a volunteer became reluctant to continue causing pain, the experimenter in charge would say something like: "The experiment requires that you continue." Under these conditions, two-thirds of the volunteers continued to pull the electrical switches on wrong answers, even when the subjects showed agonizing pain. One-third refused.

The experiment was tried with the volunteers at different distances from the subjects. When they were not physically close to the subject, about 35 percent of the volunteers defied

authority even when they could not see or talk with the subject. But when they were right next to the subject, 70 percent refused the order.

The behavior of the people who were willing to inflict maximum pain can certainly be explained without recourse to “human nature.” Their behavior was learned, not inborn. What they learned is what most people learn in modern culture, to follow orders, to do the job you are hired to do, to obey the experts in charge. In the experiment the supervisors, who had a certain standing and a certain legitimacy as directors of a “scientific” experiment, kept assuring the volunteers that they should go ahead, even if the subjects showed pain. When they were distant from the subjects, it was easier to obey the experimenters. But seeing or hearing the pain close up brought out some strong natural feeling of empathy, enough to disobey even the legitimate, confident, scientific supervisors of the experiment.

Some people interpreted the results of the experiment as showing an innate cruelty in human beings, but this was not the conclusion of Stanley Milgram, who directed the study. Milgram sums up his own views: “It is the extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority that constitutes the chief finding of the study This is, perhaps, the most fundamental lesson of our study: ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process.”

So it is a learned response—“always obey,” “do your job”—and not a natural drive, that caused so many of the people to keep pulling the pain switches. What is remarkable in the Milgram experiment, given the power of “duty . . . obedience” taught to us from childhood, is not that so many obeyed, but that so many refused.

C.P. Snow, a British novelist and scientist, wrote in 1961:

When you think of the long and gloomy history of man, you will find more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than have ever been committed in the name of rebellion. The German Officer Corps were brought up in the most rigorous code of obedience . . . in the name of obedience they were party to, and assisted in, the most wicked large-scale actions in the history of the world.

What about the evidence from anthropology—that is, from the behavior of “primitive” people, who are supposed to be closest to the “natural” state and, therefore, give strong clues about “human nature”? There have been many studies of the personality traits of such people: African Bushmen, North American Indians, Malay tribes, the Stone Age Tasaday from the Philippines, etc.

The findings can be summed up easily: There is no single pattern of warlike or peaceable behavior; the variations are very great. In North America, the Plains Indians were warlike, the Cherokee of Georgia were peaceful.

Anthropologist Colin Turnbull conducted two different studies in which he lived for a while with native tribes. In *The Forest People*, he describes the Pygmies of the Ituri rain forest in central Africa, wonderfully gentle and peaceful people whose idea of punishing a wrongdoer was to send him out into the forest to sulk. When he observed the Mbuti tribe of Zaire, he found them cooperative and pacific. However, when Turnbull spent time with the Ik people of East Africa, whom he describes in *The Mountain People*, he found them ferocious and selfish.

The differences in behavior Turnbull found were explainable, not by genetics, not by

the “nature” of these people, but by their environment, or their living conditions. The relatively easy life of the forest people fostered good will and generosity. The Ik, on the other hand, had been driven from their natural hunting grounds by the creation of a national game reserve into an isolated life of starvation in barren mountains. Their desperate attempt to survive brought out the aggressive destructiveness that Turnbull saw.

There have been many attempts to use the evidence of ethology (the study of the behavior of animals) to “prove” innate aggressiveness in human beings. We find Robert Ardrey using animal protection of their territory to argue for a “territorial imperative,” which drives human beings to war against one another, or Desmond Morris, who uses the evidence of primates (*The Naked Ape*) to see human beings as deeply influenced by their evolutionary origins as tribal hunters.

But the study of animal behavior turns up all kinds of contradictory evidence. Baboons observed in a London zoo were found to be violent, but when studied on the plains of South Africa their behavior was peaceful. The difference was easily explainable by the fact that in the zoo baboons were strangers to one another, brought together by man. Even when baboons were aggressive, this consisted mostly of yelling and squabbling, not doing serious damage to one another.

We might note the work of Konrad Lorenz, an important zoologist and a specialist in the study of birds who could not resist the temptation to turn to human behavior in his book, *On Aggression*. Lorenz is often cited to support the idea that aggressive instincts in human beings derive from evolutionary origins in animal behavior. But Lorenz was not that certain. Indeed, he said at one point that none of our so-called instincts are as dangerous as our “emotional allegiance to cultural values.”

It is a big jump, in any case, from bees or ducks or even baboons to human beings. Such a jump does not take account of the critically different factor of the human brain, which enables learning and culture and which creates a whole range of possibilities—good and bad. Those wide possibilities are not available to creatures with limited intelligence whose behavior is held close to their genetic instincts (although even with them different environments bring different characteristics).

The psychologist Erik Erikson, moving away from Freud’s emphasis on biological instinct and on impressions gained in infancy, has pointed to the fact that, unlike most animals, human beings have a long childhood, a period for learning and cultural influence. This creates the possibility for a much wider range of behaviors. Erikson says that our cultures have created “pseudospecies”—that is, false categories of race and nation that obliterate our sense of ourselves as one species and thus encourage the hostility that turns violent.

Animals other than human beings do not make war. They do not engage in organized violence on behalf of some abstraction. That is a special gift of creatures with advanced brains and cultures. The animal commits violence for specific, visible reasons: the need for food and for self-defense.

Genetics, psychology, anthropology, and zoology—in none of these fields is there evidence of a human instinct for the kind of aggressive violence that characterizes war. But what about history, which Freud pointed to?

Who can deny the frequency of war in human history? But its persistence does not prove that its origin is in human nature. Are there not persistent facts about human society that can explain the constant eruption of war without recourse to those mysterious instincts that

science, however hard it tries, cannot find in our genes? Is not one of those facts the existence of ruling elites in every culture, who become enamored of their own power and seek to extend it? Is not another of those facts the greed, not of the general population, but of powerful minorities in society who seek more raw materials or more markets or more land or more favorable places for investment? Is there not a persistent ideology of nationalism, especially in the modern world, a set of beliefs taught to each generation in which the Motherland or the Fatherland is an object of veneration and becomes a burning cause for which one becomes willing to kill the children of other Motherlands or Fatherlands?

Surely we do not need human nature to explain war; there are other explanations. But human nature is simple and easy. It requires very little thought. To analyze the social, economic, and cultural factors that throughout human history have led to so many wars—that is hard work. One can hardly blame people for avoiding it.

But we should take another look at the proposition that the persistence of war in history proves that war comes from human nature. The claim requires that wars be not only frequent, but perpetual—that they not be limited to some nations but be true of all. Because if wars are only intermittent—if there are periods of war and periods of peace and if there are nations that go to war and other nations that don’t—then it is unreasonable to attribute war to something as universal as human nature.

Whenever someone says, “history proves . . .” and then cites a list of historical facts, we should beware. We can always select facts from history (there are lots to choose from) to prove almost anything about human behavior. Just as one can select from a person’s life just those instances of mean and aggressive behavior to prove the person naturally mean and aggressive, one can also select from that same person’s life only those instances of kind and affectionate behavior to prove him or her naturally nice.

Perhaps we should turn from these scholarly studies of history, genetics, anthropology, psychology, and zoology to the plain reality of war itself. We surely have a lot of experience with that in our time.

I remember reading John Hersey’s novel, *The War Lover*. It interested me greatly, partly because I am an admirer of Hersey’s writing, but even more because his subject was the crew of a Flying Fortress, the B17 heavy bomber in World War II. I had been a bombardier on such a crew in just that war. The novel’s main character is a pilot who loves war. He also loves women. He is a braggart and a bully in regard to both. It turns out that his boasted sex exploits are a fraud and, in fact, he is impotent; it appears that his urge to bomb and kill is connected to that impotence.

When I finished reading the novel, I thought: *Well, that may explain this piss-poor* (a phrase left over from that war) *fellow Hersey has picked as his subject and his lust for violence and death. But it doesn’t explain war.*

The men I knew in the air force—the pilots, navigators, bombardiers, and gunners on the crews flying over Europe, dropping bombs, and killing lots of people—were not lusting to kill, were not enthusiasts for violence, and were not war lovers. They—we—were engaged in large-scale killing, mostly of non-combatants, the women, children, and elderly people who happened to inhabit the neighborhoods of the cities that we bombed (officially, these were all “military targets”). But this did not come out of our natures, which were no different than when we were peacefully playing, studying, and living the lives of American boys back in Brooklyn, New York, or Aurora, Missouri.

The bloody deeds we did came out of a set of experiences not hard to figure out. We had been brought up to believe that our political leaders had good motives and could be trusted to do right in the world. We had learned that the world had good guys and bad guys, good countries and bad countries, and ours was good. We had been trained to fly planes, fire guns, operate bombsights, and to take pride in doing the job well. And we had been trained to follow orders, which there was no reason to question, because everyone on our side was good, and on the other side, bad. Besides, we didn't have to watch a little girl's legs get blown off by our bombs—we were 30,000 feet high and no human being on the ground was visible, no scream could be heard. Surely that is enough to explain how men can participate in war. We don't have to grope in the darkness of human nature.

Indeed, when you look at modern war, do you find men rushing into it with a ferocious desire to kill? Hardly. You find men (and some women) joining the armed forces in search of training, careers, companionship, glamour, and psychological and economic security. You find others being conscripted by law, under penalty of prison if they refuse. And all of them suddenly transported into a war, where the habit of following orders and the dinning into their ears of the rightness of their cause can overcome the fear of death or the moral scruples of murdering another human being.

Many observers of war, and former soldiers too, have spoken of the lures of war for men, its attractions and enticements, as if something in men's nature makes war desirable for them. J. Glenn Gray, who was in army intelligence and close to combat situations in the European theater during World War II, has a chapter in his book *The Warriors* called "The Enduring Appeals of Battle." He writes of the "powerful fascination" of war. He says, "The emotional environment of warfare has always been compelling . . . Many men both hate and love combat." What are these "appeals" of war, according to Gray? "The delight in seeing, the delight in comradeship, the delight in destruction."

He recalls the biblical phrase "the lust of the eye" to describe the sheer overpowering spectacle of war, the astounding scenes, the images, the vignettes—things never before experienced by young men who lived ordinary lives on ordinary farms or ordinary streets. That is certainly true. I had never seen the innards of a fifty-caliber machine gun; had never flown in an airplane miles high, in the night and close to the stars, overwhelmed by the beauty of that, and operated my bombsight and watched specks of fire flare like tiny torches on the ground below; and had never seen at close range the black puffs that were the explosions of anti-aircraft shells, threatening my life. But that is not a love of war; it is an aesthetic need for visual and emotional excitement that comes, unrequested, with war and that can also be produced by other experiences.

Gray is also certainly right about the extraordinary comradeship of men in combat. But they don't seek combat because of that, any more than men in prison seek imprisonment because in prison they often forge human ties with fellow prisoners far stronger than any they have on the outside.

As for the "delight in destruction," I am skeptical about that. Granted, there is something visually exciting about explosions and something satisfying about hitting your target efficiently, as you were trained to do. But the delight that comes in a job well done would accompany any kind of job, not just destroying things.

All of the elements Gray and others have talked about as "the enduring appeals" of war are appeals not of violence or murder but of the concomitants of the war situation. It is sad that



Courtesy of *Norwegian Sky* Art Gallery

life is so drab, so unsatisfying for so many that combat gives them their first ecstatic pleasures, whether in “seeing” or companionship or work done well. It challenges us to find what the philosopher William James called “the moral equivalent of war,” ways to make life outside of war vivid, affectionate, even thrilling.

Gray himself, although he tries to understand and explain those “enduring appeals,” is offended by war. *The Warriors* recalls an entry in his own wartime journal, made December 8, 1944, which reflects not only his own feelings, but that of so many other veterans of war, that war is an affront to our nature as human beings. He wrote:

Last night I lay awake and thought of all the inhumanity of it, the beastliness of the war . . . I remembered all the brutal things I had seen since I came overseas, all the people rotting in jail, some of whom I had helped to put there . . . I thought of Plato’s phrase about the wise man caught in an evil time who refuses to participate in the crimes of his fellow citizens, but hides behind a wall until the storm is past. And this morning, when I rose, tired and distraught from bed, I knew that in order to survive this time I must love more. There is no other way.

When the U.S. government decided to enter World War I, it did not find an eager army of males, just waiting for an opportunity to vent their “natural” anger against the enemy, to indulge their “natural” inclination to kill. Indeed, there was a large protest movement against entrance into the war, leading Congress to pass punitive legislation for anti-war statements (2,000 people were prosecuted for criticizing the war). The government, besides conscripting men for service on threat of prison and jailing anti-war protesters, had to organize a propaganda campaign, sending 75,000 speakers to give 750,000 speeches in hundreds of towns and cities to persuade people of the rightness of the war.

Even with all that, there was resistance by young men to the draft. In New York City, ninety of the first hundred draftees claimed exemption. In Minnesota, the *Minneapolis Journal* reported: “Draft Opposition Fast Spreading in State.” In Florida, two black farm workers went into the woods with a shotgun and mutilated themselves to avoid the draft; one blew off four fingers of his hand, the other shot off his arm below the elbow. A senator from Georgia reported “general and widespread opposition . . . to the enactment of the draft . . . Mass meetings held in every part of the State protested against it.” Ultimately, over 330,000 men were classified as draft evaders.

We have an enormous literature of war. Much of it was written by men who experienced combat: Erich Remarque and Ernest Hemingway on World War I; Norman Mailer, James Jones, Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller, and Paul Fussell on World War II; Philip Caputo, Tim O’Brien, John DelVecchio, Bill Ehrhart, and Ron Kovic on Vietnam. The men they write about are not (with occasional exceptions) bloodthirsty killers, consumed by some ferocious instinct to maim and destroy other human beings. They connect across a whole century with the young scared kid in *Red Badge of Courage*; they experience fear more than hate, fatigue more than rage, and boredom more than vengeance. If any of them turn into crazed killers for some moment or some hour, it is not hard to find the cause in the crazed circumstances of war, coming on top of the ordinary upbringing of a young man in a civilized country.

A GI named John Ketwig wrote a letter to his wife:

After all those years of preparation in the schools, you walked out the door, and they told you it was your duty to kill the commies in South Vietnam. If you wouldn't volunteer, they would draft you, force you to do things against your will. Put you in jail. Cut your hair, take away your mod clothes, train you to kill. How could they do that? It was directly opposite to everything your parents had been saying, the teachers had been saying, the clergymen had been saying. You questioned it, and your parents said they didn't want you to go, but better that than jail. The teacher said it was your duty. The clergy said you wouldn't want your mother to live in a communist country, so you'd best go fight them in Asia before they landed in California. You asked about 'Thou shalt not kill,' and they mumbled.

It was no instinct to kill that led John Ketwig into military duty, but the pressure of people around him, the indoctrination of his growing up. So it is not remarkable that he joined the military. What is remarkable is that at a certain point he rebelled against it.

While two million men served in Vietnam at one time or another, another half million evaded the draft in some way. And of those who served, there were perhaps 100,000 deserters. About 34,000 GIs were court-martialed and imprisoned. If an instinct really was at work, it was not for war, but against it.

Once in the war, the tensions of combat on top of the training in obedience produced atrocities. In the My Lai Massacre we have an extreme example of the power of a culture in teaching obedience. In My Lai, a hamlet in South Vietnam, a company of U.S. soldiers landed by helicopter early one morning in March 1968, with orders to kill everybody there. In about one hour, although not a single shot was fired at them, they slaughtered about 400 Vietnamese, most of them old people, women, and children. Many of them were herded into ditches and then mowed down with automatic rifles.

One of the American soldiers, Charles Hutto, said later, "The impression I got was that we was to shoot everyone in the village An order came down to destroy all of the food, kill all the animals and kill all the people . . . then the village was burned I didn't agree with the killings but we were ordered to do it."

It is not at all surprising that men go to war, when they have been cajoled, bribed, propagandized, conscripted, threatened—and also not surprising that after rigorous training they obey orders, even to kill unarmed women and children. What is surprising is that some refuse.

At My Lai a number of soldiers would not kill when ordered to: Michael Bernhardt, Roy Wood, Robert Maples, a GI named Grzesik. Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson commanded a helicopter that flew over the scene and, when he saw what was happening, he landed the helicopter and rescued some of the women and children, ordering his crewmen to fire on GIs if they fired on the Vietnamese. Charles Hutto, who participated in the My Lai Massacre, said afterward:

I was 19 years old, and I'd always been told to do what the grown-ups told me to do But now I'll tell my sons, if the government calls, to go, to serve their country, but to use their own judgment at times . . . to forget about authority . . . to use their own conscience. I wish somebody had told me that before I went to Vietnam. I didn't know. Now I don't think there should be even a thing called war . . . 'cause

it messes up a person's mind.

In British novelist George Orwell's essay, "Shooting an Elephant," he recalls his experience in Burma, when he was a minor official of the British Empire. An elephant ran loose, and he finally shot it to death, but notes he did this not out of any internal drive, not of malice, but because people around him expected him to do that, as part of his job. It was not in his "nature."

The American feminist and anarchist Emma Goldman, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, before so much of the scientific discussion of the relationship between violence and human nature, said:

Poor human nature, what horrible crimes have been committed in thy name! Every fool, from king to policeman, from the flathead parson to the visionless dabbler in science, presume to speak authoritatively of human nature. The greater the mental charlatan, the more definite his insistence on the wickedness and weaknesses of human nature. Yet how can any one speak of it today, with every soul a prison, with every heart fettered, wounded, and maimed?

Her point about "the visionless dabbler in science" was affirmed half a century later by Nobel Prize-winning biologist Salvatore E. Luria, who points to the misuse of science in attributing violent behavior to our genes. Moving away from genetic determinism and its mood of inevitability (as too often interpreted, the inevitability of war and death), Luria says that biologists have a nobler role for the future: to explore "the most intriguing feature—the creativity of the human spirit."

That creativity is revealed in human history, but it is a history that Machiavelli and a succession of scholarly pessimists ignore as they concentrate on the worst aspects of human behavior. There is another history, of the rejection of violence, the refusal to kill, and the yearning for community. It has shown itself throughout the past in acts of courage and sacrifice that defied all the immediate pressures of the environment.

This was true even in the unspeakable conditions of the German death camps in World War II, as Terence des Pres pointed out in his book *The Survivor*. He wrote: "The depth and durability of man's social nature may be gauged by the fact that conditions in the concentration camps were designed to turn prisoners against each other, but that in a multitude of ways, men and women persisted in social acts."

It is true that there is an infinite human capacity for violence. There is also an infinite potential for kindness. The unique ability of humans to imagine gives enormous power to idealism, an imagining of a better state of things not yet in existence. That power has been misused to send young men to war. But the power of idealism can also be used to attain justice, to end the massive violence of war.

Anyone who has participated in a social movement has seen the power of idealism to move people toward self-sacrifice and cooperation. I think of Sam Block, a young black Mississippian, very thin and with very bad eyes, taking black people to register to vote in the murderous atmosphere of Greenwood, Mississippi, in the early 1960s. Block was accosted by a sheriff (another civil rights worker, listening, recorded their conversation):

SHERIFF: Nigger, where you from?

BLOCK: I'm a native of Mississippi.

SHERIFF: I know all the niggers here.

BLOCK: Do you know any colored people? (The sheriff spat at him.)

SHERIFF: I'll give you till tomorrow to get out of here.

BLOCK: If you don't want to see me here, you better pack up and leave, because I'll be here.

History, so diligent at recording disasters, is largely silent on the enormous number of courageous acts by individuals challenging authority and defying death.

* * * * *



Courtesy of Norwegian Sky Art Gallery

Tom Sheehan**Dillinger, on His Way into the Movies**

The air's
popcorned,
butter-rich,
slicing.

The girl
trembles
electric:
it must
be my
touch, the
allure
of it.

She has
odors
ripe as
berries,
markets
open
early.



Her dress
is *Lupinus*
Perennis,
Maritime
roadside
purple
like a rich
woman's
lingerie,

tight in
the crotch,
heady.

After-
wards will
be the
real thing.

* * *

39 Stone Street

You gave all of us names,
out of your presumptive fiction,
from baseball statistics, organic names
out of Byron's *Unpublished poems* as you
called them, from a freak spin on basketball
court when the ball tipped in off *Tutu's* fingertips.

We come now, called and bidden, only
names alive to share your leaving, daring us
to be civil in the whole matter, laughing up your
sleeve about all this clap-trap and silly ties, dark
jackets on a hot night when your veins are
cool and glacier-slow.

All of us you'd fool,
you said, slipping out of bounds
before we'd even know, leaving camp
when we would least notice the huge emptiness
you somehow carried for years in your back pocket
like an unexpended plug of brash tobacco.
You knew something we didn't.

The walls are made of speech.
your nouns and names sound like posters
having voice. More than one of us thinks you
might sit up and laugh before this night's over,
before comes down fragile cherry-wood
lid, ticket finally punched, you've said,
a Boston & Maine conductor's tally.

Myself, I thought you'd never go,
 knowing basketball and Baudelaire,
 too full of the sense of imagery at hand,
 the cautions of similes and other like tastes,
 too brave to call when pain tore like blowouts
 through your heart. This is about those so named,
39 Stone. They'll know way past where they've gone,
 light enough to read new signs, new paths, Jake,
 Ronnie, Barney, Ormie, a host of pals gone
 on in their delivery, taking pieces with
 casual indifference, bio notes, stars
 in the running, images loose,
 memories called on cue.

That night in Shea Stadium,
 in the end zone cheaper seats, those
 around us found out we were from Boston,
 you stood at the challenge, 6'5", 337 pounds,
 just at the moment Emerson Boozer broke free
 of Nick Buoniconti's grasp, in a TD flight
 that refereed us from combat, saved
 our souls for this other flight;
 that sticks with me yet, 39.

* * * * *


 Bags End News
 No. 212 February 3, 1992
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

The Grats Buny Pillo Referendum!

It iz a strang day indeed wen that big flufy skery pillo gy, Betsee, iz volunteriley nis too enywen in Bagzend eksept Mees Chrees.

That strang day cam wen Betsee cam bounsing intoo Shlelas' Thron. Room. Me an Shlela wer part naping an part talking about ketching up Shlelas' mayer papr-werk.

"Ekscoos me, Shlela, but I want too tawk too yu, sed Betsee almost politleey.

Tak a numbr an wate in the resepsyun lounge," sed Shlela aul grumpeey.

Wel, yor old pal Algernon desn

3-2-92
 12:41 p.m.
 CT State
 Library
 Reading Rm



Bags End Book #5: The Great Bunny Pillow Referendum!

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

The Great Bunny Pillow Referendum! Part 1.

It is a strange day indeed when that big fluffy scary Bunny Pillow guy, called Betsy, is voluntarily nice to anyone in Bags End except Miss Chris, who had saved her long ago after she escaped from Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Farm. Farmer Jones is this bad guy who grows Bunny Pillows & sells them to rich people. And Betsy's greatest enemy.

That strange day came when Betsy came bouncing into Sheila Bunny's Throne Room. Me & Sheila were part napping & part talking about catching up Sheila's Mayor's paperwork.

You see, though she claims to be King, & Emperor, & Monarch of Bags End, in truth Sheila is really just the Mayor, & it involves doing a lot of paperwork. And she has only me for her illiterate secretary to help her out. It's pretty grumpifying for her.

"Excuse me, Sheila," said Betsy in her whispery voice. "I would like to talk to you." She sounded almost polite.

"Take a number & wait in the reception lounge," said Sheila, all grumpy. Paperwork was interfering with her daily afternoon nap.

Well, your old pal Algernon doesn't have to be told twice when there is trouble blazing all around him. So quickly I ranned behind Sheila's Throne & quietly listened.

"What do you want, Pillow?" said a Sheila voice.

"I need the help of all of the Bags End Friends in my crusade to liberate the

Bunny Pillows from the evil grasp of Farmer Jones," whispered a Betsy voice.

"Betsy, we've been through all this over & over. And I did help you once. Remember?" said Sheila.

"I want to hold a referendum to get the best idea to defeat Jones," said Betsy.

There was quiet. "This is new," said Sheila.

"I hope someone can think of something I can't," whispered Betsy.

"I will think about it. Now leave me alone," said Sheila.

I thought Betsy was gonna scream, but she didn't. She said "thank you & goodbye," & left. I was stunned.

"You can crawl out now, Beagle," said Sheila.

"What's a referendum?" I asked.

Sheila slouched down in her Throne. I rested in mah favorite spot near her. "Betsy wants everyone to use their imaginations to come up with some crazy new plan to defeat Farmer Jones."

"So are you gonna let her?"

Sheila stared up at the ceiling with 1 purple eye closed, like she always does when she is thinking. "I suppose. I just don't think it will help."

A couple of days later, I was sitting in the Bunny Family's TV room, watching "The Sheila Show," & saw Sheila hop onto the Bags End Auditorium stage with Betsy Bunny Pillow!

"Today's show will be Betsy asking for your help. Listen good. Well, goodbye," & Sheila left the stage.

Betsy looked into the camera & said, "None of you better turn this show off. My Allies are planted strategically where they can watch you watching me." I looked around quickly but I didn't see nobody. I wouldn't have turned off the TV anyway.

"Bags End has a historic chance to help me & my people, & find its way into the annals of our struggles for liberty," Betsy whispered. I didn't understand what she said, but it sounded tricky.

"All of you will be receiving a ballot upon which to write your good idea for liberating the Bunny Pillow Farm. You have one week to fill out the ballot, & put it in one of the specially marked Ballot Boxes placed around Bags End. So think hard!" & with that Betsy bounced off the stage & was gone.

Let me tell you that I never thought I would be told to think of a good idea to free the Bunny Pillows. I couldn't think of anything. It drove me crazy.

I mean, what do I know of such things? I just do mah newspaper, & try to stay out of the snaring plans of the big guys in Bags End.

But then I thought: maybe I could write mean things about Jones in mah newspaper. Hm. No, I thought some more, that really isn't mah style.

So I thought harder & harder, & pretty soon I had a headache. I decided to visit Miss Chris in her TV room in Connecticut. She was happy to see me, & gaved me a big hug which did wonders for mah headache.

We watched some TV. There was a people-folks news program all about this big election that had started. They showed something called a poll to tell which guy was the most popular. Then they showed people-folks telling what they thought.

Well, bing! went an idea in mah head. "I know! I know! I will have a poll & ask Bags End guys what they think of Farmer Jones, & then I will write it in mah newspaper!" I yelled.

"That's a good idea, A-wa-wa!" said Miss Chris, & then she hugged me quite nicely.

I ranned back to Bags End, & found mah smart pal & staff member of Bags End News, Lori Bunny, who is also Sheila's older sister. She was in her room she shares with Sheila, reading a real big book. When Lori reads a book, she puts on these round little glasses that make her look even smarter.

"Lori! We have to do a poll! We have to interview Bags End guys & then write our newspaper all about it!" I yelled. I was so excited I jumped up on Lori's bed, & rolled over the other side, & hurt mah nosebone.

"O! Mah nosebone!" I cried in my pains. Well, Lori helped me up & patted mah nosebone till I felt better. Then we talked about mah idea. Lori got out this big book

& read a long story about taking polls. I gave her a certain look & she smiled & said, "Algernon, what all that stuff means is that we have to be careful that we ask fair questions, & count all of our results twice."

"OK, OK, I am ready. Let's go." I jumped off the bed & pulled Lori's paw to get her to come too. She pulled me back though.

"Algernon, we have to plan & prepare. We can't run off half-crazed like this," she said.

I returned slowly. It sounded more like homework than fun. I wondered if I should come up with an easier plan. But Lori wouldn't let me change mah mind. She can be as stubborn as Sheila when she wants to be.

So we decided to make up 10 good questions to ask Bags End guys about Farmer Jones & his Bunny Pillow Farm.

I don't know how Betsy heard about mah plan, but she came bouncing into Lori's room in the middle of all this.

"Hello, Algernon," she said in her whispery voice. I quietly looked for a way to escape.

"Betsy, we're busy. You can't be here," Lori said.

"I just wanted to see how my friend Algernon & his poll were doing," Betsy said. Boy! If a voice could sound nice & thrash you at once, hers would have.

Instead, Lori told Betsy to leave right away. Betsy didn't want to, but Lori made her.

I would have made a terrible bunny. Not only is mah nosebone too big, but I am not brave enough.

The Great Bunny Pillow Referendum! **Part 2.**

Some people think that when you live in a fantasyland, you have it made. Let me tell you, that may be true in places like Oz & Narnia, but where I live in Bags End you not only have to watch your step, but you have to watch who else is watching your step. Crazed joint.

Here was this great big scary whispering Betsy Bunny Pillow, & Sheila Bunny decided to let her have a referendum on how to defeat Farmer Jones & liberate the Bunny Pillow Farm. I decided mah way would be to take a poll to see what Bags End guys think of of him. Other guys had different ideas on what to do.

The week Betsy gave to come up with bright ideas was over, & Betsy gathered up all the Ballot Boxes with ideas in there. I wanted to be there when she read the suggestions, but she told me that had to be done in private with her Allies.

"But that's censorship, Betsy!" I cried.

"Yes. Yes, it is," she said in her whispery voice, & she bounced away.

So I waited eagerly with Sheila in her Throne Room for news of the referendum's results. Sheila was so anxious she fell sound asleep.

I got so bored of being eager that I left. I went to see Lori so we could work on preparing mah newspaper's poll on Farmer Jones.

Lori told me we should ask some hard questions, "think" questions she called them, & some easier "yes-no" kinds. I guess we worked real hard cuz I fell asleep & Lori helped the sleepy me to bed later.

I guess what Bags End Friends see as the solution & what Betsy thinks aren't even 3rd cousins cuz Betsy was real mad the next day on the "Betsy Bunny Pillow & Her Allies Televised Broadcast."

She bounced onto the stage of the Bags End Auditorium & said, "I restrained myself from smothering all of you last night as I read the suggestions you made for conquering the evil Jones!"

She dragged a Ballot Box on stage & began to read ballots from it:

*** Play jazz real loud all around Farmer Jones' Farm until he is so happy he doesn't care what you do.

*** Discuss with Jones the extraordinary evolution of the planet's beings, & how the final abolishment of all enslaving institutions shall finally come to pass. If he is ready to evolve to this stage, he will. If not, wait patiently.

*** Dwaft him into the mwilitary & tweach him condwukt bwefitting a dwogfwace. Then order him to welease the Pwillows & he will.

*** Free yourself of the wantonly superficial demands of this physical plane & float away friendly & identity-less into the Universe.

*** Bump! (which means teach Farmer Jones Bump Language & of course he will not enslave the Pillows. He may even teach them Bump too.)

*** Squeak Squeak Squeak (which means tell him a real good Squeak joke & then laugh a lot!)

*** O! Mah aches & pains!

*** O! Jones! Yum! O! Pillows! Yum!

*** Take a good long nap. Then roll over & get some sleep.

*** Find out if he has any good comic books.

*** Grr nicely.

*** Make him convince Betsy that on a symbolic level she needs him as a kind of raison d'être as much as he needs her opposition to justify, from a narrative point of view, his occasional appearances in these Bags End stories.

*** Hop away fast when the astronomers point their telescopes at you.

As Betsy read these, she was getting madder & madder. I knew cuz her whispery voice was all cracked & screechy.

"And these are the best ones I got! Are you all without brains anywhere? A race languishes in chains & you tell me to grr nicely? To tell squeak jokes? To Bump???"

"Well, let me tell you. I have had it with all of you! You're all crazy & useless to me. Me & my Allies are leaving Bags End to lay constant siege to Farmer Jones until he or us go down for good! Goodbye!"

Betsy bounced off the stage real mad & I guessed the show was over.

I didn't think Betsy would really leave Bags End. At worst I guessed she would attack Jones again, & he would defeat her again, & she would come back.

But she didn't. She wasn't in school the next day, or the one after that, or after that.

I tried to talk to Sheila about it but she wasn't interested.

"She will be back. Or not. I never did like her racist radical extremism."

Well, I didn't bother to ask what all that stuff meant cuz I guessed it was about bothering Sheila & attacking Jones all the time, & so on.

I decided to gather mah senses & go see mah pal Princess Chrisakah in Imagianna.

I found Crissy in her Palace in her Sleep Pad which is a bedroom. She was dressed all in black like she was going trick-&-treating as midnight. O! Treating! Yuk!

Crissy hugged me well & I sat next to her. She was reading poems by a guy named Octavio Paz who writes in Spanish. Crissy's book had Paz's poetry dressed nicely

up in English.

She thought for a while about mah problem. Then she looked at me hardish. "Do your poll, Algernon. You promised, after all. Then, if you still hear no word, me & you will go find her & save her if she is in trouble!"

I liked Crissy's idea a lot cuz it was polite & brave, but polite first. So I hugged her in black & went back to Bags End.

I got Lori & told her we were done preparing our poll, & the next day we would start. She smiled OK.

The Great Bunny Pillow Referendum! **Part 3.**

So here finally is mah poll. Sheila told me I had to use her name on it or it wouldn't be official. When I asked her to help, she said, "of course not."

The Bags End News **& S. R. Bunny** **Bags End Poll**

Question Number 1: Do you know about the conflict between Farmer Jones & Betsy Bunny Pillow?

*** Most guys said yes.

*** Some guys said yes, but they wish they didn't.

*** One guy said Bump.

Question Number 2: Which side do you agree with, if any?

***Most guys said Betsy was probably right, but they didn't like her enough to be on her side.

*** A couple said the stories were entertaining to read.

*** One guy said Bump Bump.

Question Number 3: Does Farmer Jones have a right to his Farm & to grow Pillows & sell them to rich people if he wants?

*** Some guys said yes.

*** Some guys said no.

*** Some guys said don't know.

*** One guy said Bump.

Question Number 4: If Betsy Bunny Pillow asked you for help to defeat Jones, would you say yes?

*** Many guys said they had already helped. Most said they would help again, probably.

*** But nobody seemed eager to volunteer.

*** I ignored the Bump answerer.

Question Number 5: Is this Betsy Bunny Pillow's problem alone, or is it Bags End's problem cuz she lives here?

*** Most guys said Betsy is the problem but she can't be ignored cuz she is mean.

*** I told the Bump answerer to learn English.

Question Number 6: Why has Betsy failed to defeat Farmer Jones before?

*** Cuz she is mean, cuz she is crazy, too much ego, were the common answers.
 *** A few said it was cuz Farmer Jones was too smart, but most blamed Betsy's failure on Betsy.
 *** I told the Bump answerer I had no time for his kind.

Question Number 7: If Betsy was to defeat Farmer Jones today, would you rather have 100s of refugee Pillows come to Bags End, or never see Betsy again?

*** Most guys said if the Pillows are nicer than Betsy, then they can come.
 *** But everyone said no to hundreds of Betsys.
 *** The Bump answerer was informed that this was not a Bump poll.

Question Number 8: Should Betsy Bunny Pillow be told to stop?

*** Everyone said no. Most said she wouldn't listen. Some said: why bother?
 *** The Bump answerer was told: for help, see your representative.

Question Number 9: Could there be a compromise between Betsy & Jones?

*** Almost everyone said no cuz Betsy is too crazy & Jones has no reason to compromise.
 *** One guy said: "If you won, why settle for a tie?"
 *** The heretofore Bump answerer left. Good riddance.

Question Number 10: Would Betsy be happy if she defeated Jones?

*** Some guys said yes.
 *** Some guys said no.
 *** Some said: who knows?
 *** Some said: who cares?

The poll kind of disappointed me. I learned that almost nobody really likes Betsy, or cares if she defeats Jones. Betsy is not really popular in Bags End, I guess.

I retreated to mah bedroom to think about mah poll for awhile. I hoped it would show that we all care about Betsy, & don't like Jones one bit.

Instead, I learned that Betsy is thought of as a crazy bully who is a big problem in Bags End.

The more I thought, the madder I got. Betsy may have her strange ways, but people should care if she's upset!

Mah bravebone hadn't gotten a good workout for awhile, but it got me to go see Princess Crissy that night & tell her all about the poll. Crissy looked really cute with her hair all tangled & her PJs with R.E.M. pictures all over them.

"I am really upset, Crissy," I said. "I mean, we are really selfish if we don't care about this. But what can I do?"

She gave me a hug. A quality hug, I add. "Stay over with me tonight, Algernon, & tomorrow we will go find Betsy & help her," she said.

Well, I had never slept over Crissy's castle before. She told me she would make sure mah adopted Bunny-mommy Pat would know & so not worry.

Me & Crissy got under the covers. Crissy used her tricky smile magick, & me & her shared a good dream together that had mah pals the Weeds in it, & good music by R.E.M. & Men at Work.

The next morning me & Crissy got up & Crissy told her best friend & servant Boop, who looks like a turtle but isn't one, that she was going on a journey with me. Well, Boop got all worried & upset, like he does, but Crissy just gaved him a big hug &

asked him to get her Traveling Cape. He did & it was long & black & covered her down to her black boots. She even had a hood.

"This is a special cape, Algernon," she said with a tricky smile. "We will travel as secretly as we need to."

We gaved Boop lots of hugs & kisses to unworry him some, & then we left through a door in the Castle I had never seen before. It probably disappeared after us.

The Great Bunny Pillow Referendum! **Grand Finally!**

Maybe your old pal Algernon just wanders through life missing the point. Maybe I don't pay attention. Maybe I can't afford to. I don't know, except that I never dreamed or even nightmared that I would be heading off down the road with mah pal Princess Crissy to try & save that big scary Betsy Bunny Pillow.

Through the door was a long road that I thought would lead us to Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Farm. Crissy & me walked along quietly for a long time. This was strange cuz Crissy & me usually talk a lot.

Finally, Crissy talked. "Algernon, may I ask you something about Betsy?"

"Sure, Crissy," I said.

Crissy's face was all serious as she said, "We could help her defeat Jones if that's what she wanted. I know how. It's not very hard. Should we just save her if she is in trouble, or should we help her beat him?"

A hard question. I thoughted for a while like Sheila has told me to. "Think your answer to yourself. See if you like it. If you do, then say it out loud."

"Crissy, I remember the time Betsy thought she won & all the Pillows came with her to Bags End. She stayed a little while, then she left with them to make the Bunny Pillow Free State. It was all a trick but Betsy seemed pleased. I don't think she wants someone to do it for her though. She wants to do it, & be all proud loudly later on."

Crissy listened to me & nodded. "OK, Algernon," was all she said.

It got dark after awhile, & I think I remember flying with Crissy in her cape through the air. We were with stars, & we had good dreams, & we played together while we slept.

Then it was day & we were walking on the same road some more.

I was getting kind of bored with this adventure. Too much walking. "Can we have a little adventure on the way, Crissy?" I asked. "Just a little one, please?"

Crissy smiled at me a little tricky & pretty soon I heard voices. "Long Live Algernon! Long Live the King!"

I looked to the side of the road & there were a whole lot of mah friends the Weeds!

"Hi, Weeds!" I said.

"Yayy, King!" they yelled a lot. They call me their King though I think of mahself as just a good friend & appreciator of Weeds-kind.

"Weeds, this is mah very good pal, Princess Chrisakah. She lives in Imagianna, & is a friend to Weeds too," I said. Crissy smiled her tricky Crissy smile at the Weeds.

"Yayy, Crissy!" the Weeds yelled.

The Weeds asked me where we were going, so I told them we were going to rescue Betsy Bunny Pillow. A lot of the Weeds booed, cuz Betsy is not a friend to Weeds.

"Now, Weed guys, I want you not to boo. Betsy is in trouble, we think, & so we have to save her," I said.

That's when being a good friend to the Weeds really helped me. The Weeds told me to take a bucket that was lying on the ground nearby, & transplant into it the pink weeds among them. Then they explained that if we gave these Weeds a hug I would turn into a Beagle Weed & Crissy would turn into a Crissy Weed.

"That way, you can travel through the Bunny Pillow fields quickly & sneakily," the Weeds said.

So we transplanted the Weeds, called Hallo-Weeds, by the way they disguise you,

into the bucket, & Crissy hid it beneath her black cape. It didn't even make a lump that stuck out. Then the Weeds cheered me & Crissy & even Betsy a lot.

Crissy made to leave, but I stopped her. "Say, Weeds," I said. "How do we un-Weed ourselves?"

The Weeds told me I had to yell in mah mind, "Beagle! Beagle! Beagle!" & Crissy had to yell in her mind, "Crissy! Crissy! Crissy!" That seemed like a good plan that would have to try real hard to fail. Me & Crissy said, "Thanks, Weeds," & walked on. The Weeds were still cheering us as we passed around a bend in the road.

I felt cheered up by the Weeds cuz they are good friends, just like Crissy. I asked her how long till Farmer Jones' Farm.

"We're almost there," Crissy said. Her face was serious again. Then she saw a tree at the side of the road & walked over to it. We sat together, her holding me politely in her lap.

"Algernon, I want you to be real brave when we get there," she said, all serious still.

"Are you afraid, Crissy?" I asked, hoping no really a lot.

Crissy thought about it. "No, but I have a feeling we won't have a easy time. I may have to do something drastic at some point, & I don't want you to be afraid."

Boy! This un-cheered me up fast. I was so nervous that I just nodded & didn't say no more.

We went to sleep for a little while, & had a nice shared dream again. Me & Crissy were flying in the silver & orange, & we were laughing a lot. I like our shared dreams a lot.

After waking up, we walked back to the road & Crissy said it was time to be Weeds. So she got out the pot of Hallo-Weeds from her cloak, & we hugged them a lot.

Suddenly, I was a brown & white Beagle Weed & Crissy was a green & gold Crissy Weed. We didn't really have faces no more, but I thought Crissy still had a tricky smile kind of way.

Being a Weed is strange. You feel bold & nervous a lot all at once. You want to grow everywhere, but you know the chances of getting picked is a lot in the funner places. I felt wild like they wouldn't get me, but I wasn't altogether believing this true.

We moved through the soil for quite awhile. We could only tell each other stuff when we touched, & even then it was not really words at all. I liked it, sort of.

We climbed a hill, but it didn't feel like climbing. The sun was bright & the soil was warm & wet. It was real nice.

No time to enjoy it though. On top of the hill we could see Farmer Jones' Bunny Pillow Farm. O! What a bad scene!

Some of the Bunny Pillows were growing in their usual little circular groups, but mainly what I saw was a group of Bunny Pillows, led by Betsy, carrying Farmer Jones around in a mad run. He was helpless even though he waved his arms & legs around. The Pillows were whisper yelling too, & it was a strange kind of screaming. Betsy's blue dress was ripped, & her crazy voice was louder than everybody else's.

They threw Jones down on the ground, & then Betsy fought him 1 on 1. Jones was trying to win, but Betsy had worned him out.

Save Betsy? What a crazed one I was. The one who needed saving was Farmer Jones!

Me & Crissy felt-talked a bit then. If it had been words, it would have been like this:

"Crissy, we can't let her destroy Jones! She's crazy. We have to stop her!" I said.

"I know, Algernon. Remember what I told you about being brave?"

"Yes. Is it time?"

"It's time, Algernon."

"OK, Crissy."

I waited for a minute to get scared, & then brave at mah scaredness, but

nothing happened. Betsy was rassling Jones to the ground.

Then there was a big rumble & the little Crissy Weed grew real real big. BIG. BIG!

The Crissy Weed grewed gianter & gianter until the whole Farm was in her shadow. Then these sort of viney hands reached out toward the fields. The vines took Betsy's crazed friends & planted them firmly in the ground. Another vine grabbed Jones & put him inside his house & slammed the door shut.

Betsy started screaming real loudly.

"I had him beaten! How could you! I won! I won!" she whisper screamed. She bounced toward the Crissy Weed's trunk like she was gonna fight it or something.

I hid as bravely as I could behind a tall clump of grass. I was quiet as bravely as I could.

A Crissy Weed vine picked up the crazed Betsy & then the whole Crissy Weed grewed up & up & up, & then it left the ground & was lost in the sky. I heard Betsy's crazy yells the whole time, till they were gone too.

The Farm looked peaceful like nothing happened. Jones was safe in his house, & I bravely bet he wasn't coming out for awhile.

Suddenly I bravely realized I was still a Beagle Weed. I decided I had no reason to go on being a Weed, so I bravely yelled in mah mind, "Beagle! Beagle! Beagle!"

And there was me again. I decided to go home. I wondered what happened to Crissy & Betsy, but I bravely walked on anyway.

Pretty soon I came to the same tree where Crissy & I had taken our nap. And there was Crissy again, regular girl Crissy, & she was sound asleep!

I crawled into her lap & slept too. I don't think I dreamed. I don't remember any dreams anyway.

We woked up at the same time, & looked at each other & smiled.

"You were very brave, Algernon," Crissy said.

"I think being a Weed helped. They're pretty brave creatures," I said.

We walked along together on the road for a long time. Crissy didn't have her black cloak on anymore. She was wearing her t-shirt showing Toad of Toad Hall & Sir John Falstaff, with their arms friendly around each other. Her hair was long & tangled & her smile was nice & tricky as before.

"Where's Betsy?" I asked.

Crissy's smile went away again. I got mad at myself for doing that.

"She is gonna stay with me in Imagianna for awhile, Algernon. We have to talk, her & me," she said.

Boy! Personally, I wouldn't invite Betsy to the end of the world if I could help it.

We walked along some more & then we started to sing in the nice sunshine & Crissy looked happy again.

Crissy brought me back to Bags End, gaved me a good hug, & left. She said she would be busy for awhile.

Nobody asked me where I had been or where Betsy was. I didn't care though. I knew where I had been. I knew.

Election Time Again!

Part 1.

Some quiet time passed in Bags End, & then it was time for another Mayor's election. I can't say they come regular, but maybe it's when Sheila just wants a little extra action around here. And Mayor's elections are usually quite full of trouble to tell about. Everybody in Bags End seems to go super extra crazy during them. Anyway, as a beagleboy journalist, I am always game for a good story, So I put on mah reporter's fedorah, & headed over to Sheila's Throne Room to find mah story.

The Throne Room usually is pretty simple. It's got Sheila's Throne, which is a fancy chair she & Miss Chris made together. Next to it are a pile of books Sheila

Bags End News
 No. 227 October 11, 1992
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Elekshun. Tim Agen!

Itz' a good thing yor old
 pal Algernon desnent' lik the
 spot lit' of atenshun too much
 becuz it sertenlee desent' shin
 mah way to awfen or for
 to long.

Here I had bin, chasd
 down an faknisd at big som
 of the biggest grumpiest gys
 in Bagzend whoo wantid too
 bee in mah storeebook.

Then the ~~see~~ seen ended,
 the act waz finished, an the
 play waz ovr. Sutenley it waz
 tim for another mayer's elek
 -shun in Bagzend an mah book
 woud onlee hav stayd populer

reads, about jazz & Jack Kerouac & stuff. And of course her phonograph & jazz records. Finally, a little spot nearby is where I like to sit when we talk, & I like to take naps there too.

This time there was a big sign above Sheila's Throne. She was slouched down in her Throne, listening to the talk of that nice but sometimes tricky Leo the Dark Man. Lori Bunny was there too, listening.

"Hi, Sheila!" I said, all friendly.

"Ahh, my press officer. You're late. The rest of my re-election staff is here. Pull up a piece of floor," said Sheila.

"Hey, pal, I am not on your staff. I am not going to favor one candidate over another. It wouldn't be fair, you know," said me kind of grumpy.

Sheila out-grumped me in a second. "Fair? Fair? Lori, tell the uninformed beagle here what the sign above me says."

Lori adjusted her little glasses & said, "It says, 'ELECT SHEILA OR ELSE!'"

Sheila looked at me like she had just won a big checkers game.

Lori talked some more. "Sheila, I am not on your staff either. I am here cuz you wanted to look like a big shot who has a big staff."

Now Sheila was really mad. "Now listen, you two may observe me in consultation with my campaign chief, but you can't interrupt! Continue, Leo."

Leo said, "Well, I think we should find out who is not gonna vote for you & then, when they go to vote, we give them pens with invisible ink in them."

Sheila smiled in a highly tricky way. "I like it. I like it."

"That's not fair!" I cried.

Sheila gave me an even trickier look. Boy! I bet she broke the record!

"Remember what my sign says, beagle," she said.

I looked up at the sign & remembered it said, ELECT SHEILA OR ELSE!

"We could also tell everyone who won't vote for you the wrong day for the election, so they miss it!" said Leo, who was getting all trick-happy.

Sheila liked this idea too. I wondered why Leo was being so helpful. Then I remembered that he wasn't doing his Janitor's job of scraping Miss Chris's bubble gum off the side of Bags End, which he has to do usually so Sheila will allow him to stay in Bags End. Now it made sense. Bags End guys don't do nice things unless it fills their pockets too.

"How about if we make the ballots with only your name on them!" said Leo.

Sheila liked all these suggestions. Lori looked bored. I left.

Another typical Bags End election full of tricks & cheating & bribes & so on. The candidates always try to steal the election & say they're only borrowing it. I knew that, in the end though, the Blondys would make it all fair.

I wondered who else was running for Mayor, so I wandered around mah strange homeland called Bags End in search of threatening signs & voter traps.

Election Time Again!

Part 2.

The first ones I came upon were a bunch of Puppys writing something on the Bags End Klotterplanket. This is a kind of big graffiti wall with all kinds of writings & pictures on it. The Puppys I saw were Denny, Corey, Skipper, Skippy, & some others. They were all barking & woofing & ruffing a lot. Not being a Puppy, cuz I am a Beagle who speaks English, I didn't know what they were saying or writing.

When they saw me, they got all excited & yelled, "Look! it's Barkruffwoof! He's come to help us!" They said it in English except for the Barkruffwoof part, which is supposed to be mah name Algernon in Puppy Language. Yah, right.

"Listen, you Puppy guys, I am here on a beagleboy journalist's task. Mah paper just tells what is going on, not what to do about it!" said me.

The Puppys listened to me & then discussed what I had said, I think, cuz they barked & woofed & so on, & looked at me a lot.

Denny Puppy, who is kind of the Puppy Gang's leader cuz he is so polite, said to me, "OK, Algernon. We will tell you about our Puppy Gang Coalition, & then show

you our sign."

"What's that?" I asked.

"A sign?" asked Denny.

"No, a coalition?" I asked.

Denny looked thoughtful. "Well, you see, when we decided to run for Mayor, we agreed that if we win, we will run Bags End together as the Puppy Gang Coalition."

A Group Mayor? I didn't think I liked this. At least when Sheila tries to boss someone around, there's only one of her to tell to take a hike. But with a gang, there's a bunch. What if one of the Group Mayor tells you one thing & another says something different?

The Puppys then showed me their sign. I asked Denny to read it to me cuz I am sort of an illiterate guy. Denny said yes politely.

The Puppy Gang Coalition
Principles of
Puppy Governance

(A.B. - They told me this means this is how they're gonna run things)

1. All Puppys in Bags End will automatically be invited to be a member of the Coalition.
2. Beagles & other questionable Puppy-persons who speak English or Bump or anything else may apply for membership.
3. The seat of power will be transferred to the Secret Puppy Club hideout.
4. Non-Puppys will be welcomed to stay, though of course cannot be part of the Coalition.
5. All business of governing will be conducted in Puppy Language. Other languages in Bags End will be allowed, though not endorsed.
6. The official news organ of Bags End will become a Puppy-sanctioned, Puppy-created, Puppy-linguaged medium.

There was more but I wanted to know what those last bunch of words meant.

"It means you will either write your paper in Puppy Language, or it will be superceded by another," said Denny.

"What's that mean?" I asked suspiciously.

"We will make a new newspaper to replace yours," Denny said.

Well, your old pal Algernon is not a brawling fella but when mah newspaper is threatened, I will put up mah dukes fast.

"Listen, you, you, you, Puppys, you! You can't make me stop doing mah newspaper!" I cried.

"You can keep doing it, Algernon, but it will have to be in Puppy Language," said Denny, still politely. "You missed the last one, by the way."

7. Bags End will be renamed BarkBark.

I had heard enough. I ranned away fast from the Puppys & their crazy ideas. I knew even if they got elected, too many big guys like Sheila & Betsy would never listen to their rules.

I decided to go to mah bedroom & sleep in mah bed. I had more work to do, of course, but I needed a nap break.

Instead of a welcoming room of quiet, I found mah silly Bumping brother Alexander Puppy, that nice green-eyed guy Allie Leopard, mah good friend Princess Crissy, & mah person-mommy, Miss Chris!

They were all working on a big sign. After a few desired hugs, & a few undesired Bumps, I asked them what they were all doing in mah bedroom, & what the sign said.

Miss Chris told me it said:

ALGERNON 4 MAYOR!
 PUT A BEAGLE ON
 THE THRONE!
 (A Bump-endorsed candidate)

Well, this threw your old pal Algernon into the town of Surprise, state of Confusion. I have run for Mayor before once or twice, but only as a joke, & nobody ever voted for me anyway. Not even me, cuz I always vote for Sheila so she won't hit me.

Now they were dancing around mah room, all 4 of them singing:

Vote 4 Algernon!
 He's our guy!
 Come on up & ask us
 We'll be glad to tell you why!

He's a beagle
 not a eagle!
 He's the best
 not a equal!

You get the idea. It went on & on. Finally, when nobody was looking, I sneaked onto Milne's Porch. This election was the craziest ever!

Election Time Again! Part 3.

Trials & Tribulations. Tribulations & Trials. If it wasn't for bad luck, dear Readers, I'd have some weirder kind, that's all. Election Day was coming closer, & the whole place was spooked full of strangeness. I figured I had better find out who else was running for Mayor, & what their nutty ideas were & crazy signs read.

I searched out that big, scary, & fluffy Betsy Bunny Pillow. To find her, I went to this certain level of Bags End, & to this certain door, through which is this big grassy field with a tall tree in the middle of it.

Up in the tree, which is so covered in leaves you can't hardly see into it, is Betsy's Allies Fortress. It looks just like a clubhouse, but don't tell Betsy that or she will give you a Smother Sandwich. O! Yuk! I think Betsy & her Allies built it not long after Betsy got back from her mysterious time with Princess Crissy in Imagianna.

The tree has a wire fence around it, & a Secret Way through only Betsy & her Allies know. Miss Chris too, probably.

So I came as close as I could, & yelled at the tree, "Hey, Betsy! This is the press talking! Are you running for Mayor?"

The day suddenly got dark & someone came out of the clubhouse but I couldn't see who.

"Leader Betsy says that she does not acknowledge this election, nor shall she sanction its result," said probably an Allies' voice.

"What do all those words mean?" I asked.

"They mean I don't know or care about the election!" yelled in a whisper a definitely Betsy voice.

"But you always run, Betsy!" said me. "It's more fun that way!"

Betsy's voice got kind of tricky now. "I shall choose to wield my influence in more subtle ways."

Uh-oh. It sounded like Betsy had some sneak-filled plan in her fluffy mind.

"I have to go now, Betsy," I said, & started backing toward the door back to Bags End.

"Will you carry to Sheila a message for me, Algernon?" whispered Betsy in a voice so slick you could fall & bang your head on it.

"OK," I said suspiciously.

"Tell her that what's here today could be gone tomorrow, unless it is carefully preserved."

"Sure, Betsy!" I yelled as I stumbled in the darkness toward the door that I had smartly left a little open.

Back in Bags End, I hurried toward Sheila's Throne Room. On the way, I ran into that silly red-haired Baby, Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow.

"Oh no!" groaned me, cuz she always thinks I am a sub-private in her Army of the Babys, & makes me march up & down until she says in her funny voice, "Twoops, dwissmissed!"

"Ahh, Bweagle, you're just the dwogfwace I want twoo swee," she said. I kept mah back to the wall, & was looking for a way to escape.

"Do you want me to fall in line with the rest of the troops? Where is Ramie, anyway?" I asked some more. Ramie seems to be the only other usual troop in her army.

"No mwarching twoday, bweagle. I have decided twoo wetire fwum the mwilitary & run for elected office. I will need an assistant twoo manage my cwampaign & a news organ in which twoo pwomote mwiy cwampaign efforts," Lisa said.

Not again. "Lisa, I am not going take sides. Besides, you always run for Mayor."

Lisa's baby blue eyes got small & tricky. "Bwut now thwat I am wetired, I can win! I always fworgot thwat you can do bwoth. I mean, living in the mumble, mumble . . ."

Lisa fell asleep, right there in the hallway. I ranned away before she could wake up & start making sense.

It seemed like no place in Bags End was safe from crazed candidates, or from being forced meanly or nicely to try & run for Mayor.

I wondered what the Blondys thought of all this. They're these magickal blond sisters, & they're real nice, & they make Bags End guys stop cheating, which Bags End guys love so much to do, especially during these Mayor's elections.

I decided to call them. "Blondys 3!" yelled me. "Blondys! Where are you?"

Blondys have real good hearing cuz they were floating all around me before I had even finished yelling.

Tammy is the oldest. She has a white dress & gives the Sunday school talk to Bags End friends every week. Sammy is the middle Blondy. She had a red dress & helps Santy Clause bring his presents around. Simmi is the Baby Blondy, & she is a cheerleader. They all have nice brown eyes & mysterious monalisa smiles.

Blondys float cuz they don't know the Law of Grabitee. They floated me up to them so we could all hug.

I told them all about the election & then asked Tammy what she thought.

Instead of getting a talked answer, I got floated by the Blondys right to mah bedroom. It was nice & empty of deluded "Beagle for Mayor" campaigners.

"You need to rest, Algernon," said Tammy.

"But what about the election?" I asked.

It was dark but the Blondys' hair glows, so I could see their faces.

Tammy laughed. "We will take care of it. We have to have talks with several candidates about campaigning more nicely."

"They won't like that," I muttered.

The Blondys disappeared, but I heard a faint "Yayy, Algernon!" before they were all gone.

Election Time Again! **(Grand Finally!)**

I live in a place called Bags End. It is located on the border between the fantasy world, where lands like Oz & Narnia live, & the regular world where there are places like Connecticut that Miss Chris & Ramie live in.

None of this explains the strangeness of mah homeland, except that maybe being in-between makes Bags End fuller of weirdnesses from both the regular places & the

fantasy ones.

Does any of this make it easier to explain the Mayor's election I have been telling you about? Probably not. Election Day kept creeping closer, & the candidates were reaching deeper into their bags of sneaky tricks.

That short but vast leader of Bags End, named Sheila Bunny, & her campaign chief, named Leo the Dark Man, were trying anything in the book to win, & then when the book was empty they wrote a sequel.

One day after school, Leo went around giving everyone a coupon for one free carrot (O! Yuk!) as a gift from their Mayor. Now few Bags End guys really like carrots, so that failed, & then Sheila, who loves carrots the most, forgot it was a trick & ordered Leo to give her all the coupons.

Other candidates were tricky too. The Puppy Gang Coalition would parade up & down the halls of Bags End with their signs in Puppy Language that Allie Leopard told me said things like, "PUPPYS MAKE BETTER MAYORS!" & "COME BARKING WITH US!" & other silly things.

Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow, now retired from her Army of the Babys, would crawl up to people & tell them long boring stories about the Battle of Gunga Din & Cockle-Doodle-Do. She said an old warhorse like herself had the perfect training to be Mayor.

Then someone said to her, "But, Lisa, you're not a horse!"

She said, "Dwon't hwassle me with the dwetails, bweagle!" Lisa never likes details.

Betsy Bunny Pillow & her Allies weren't around much, & when she was she was always laughing a tricky little whisper-laugh like she knew the flood was coming & already had her boat.

Finally, your old pal Algernon was still sort of a candidate too. The Blondys had made the big guys leave me alone, but Princess Crissy & Miss Chris & Allie & mah foolishly un-Englised brother Alex still wanted me to run. I said no, but they didn't listen.

On the night before the election, Mister Owl, who is the teacher of Bags End School, got a bright idea to have a Candidates' Debate. He said it's like a discussion of the important things the candidates will do if elected Mayor.

I guess debate in Bags End lingo means argument & fight, cuz that's what happened.

All the candidates were told to go to the Bags End Auditorium stage for the Debate. Even me. When I said I didn't want to, Mister Owl got kind of upset that I wouldn't do his idea, so I said yes, again listening to mah mushy old beagle's heart-bone.

Sheila, Lisa-Marie, Denny & Corey of the Puppy Coalition, me, & that tricky Betsy were all there.

"Hey, Betsy, you said you're not running!" I said.

Betsy laughed her sneaky laugh, but didn't say no words.

Mister Owl was the host, & the Auditorium filled with Bags End guys who cheered & yelled & waved signs.

"Now, candidates, the first question is: should the Mayor have more powers or fewer?" Mister Owl asked.

Sheila spoke up. "I always wanted many more. And one should be to decide who wins the election."

"You dwum Bunny! Who died & mwade you Kwing?" yelled Lisa.

"Nobody. I made myself King!" said Sheila proudly.

"Bark Bark Woof!" said Denny & Corey together.

I yelled into the audience, "What did they say, Allie?"

I heard an Allie Leopard voice yell back, "They said Puppy democracy is the best!"

Now everyone was yelling, & it took a long time for Mister Owl to make everyone be quiet again. He did, though, by saying all the candidates would get extra homework if they didn't stop. That worked.

"The next question is: do you think Bags End should sell a lot of merchandise with its pictures & logos on it?" asked Mister Owl. Then he explained that would be

toys & stuff with all our faces on them.

Sheila said, "Not a bad idea at all. I would like to see my face on lunch boxes & pogo sticks."

"O! Yuk!" I cried.

"Mwerchandising is apwopriate in a mwilitary state," said Lisa.

"Bark Woof Woof!" said the Puppys.

"They said there should be contests & the prizes should be Puppy Language dictionaries!" yelled Allie Leopard from the audience.

This began another fight that took too long to settle down.

Betsy Bunny Pillow had been scarily quiet during all this. Then I noticed her whispering to Mister Owl. He nodded.

"Candidates, Betsy wants to know your positions on liberating the Bunny Pillow Farm from Farmer Jones' evil grasp," said Mister Owl.

"When I am Mwayor, I will adwopt a strwict isolationist pposition wegarding fworeign policy," said Lisa in her big words talked baby style.

I didn't even know what Lisa said but all of a sudden she & Betsy were fighting in a heap.

Sheila was muttering, "I favor inanimate Pillows." Betsy heard this & foughted her too.

With all the big guys fighting, & the Puppys barking, & the audience yelling, your old pal Algernon decided that the Candidates' Debate was over, & the Candidates' Brawl was started. I sneaked away during the fracas, & nobody noticed. That was good.

What I wanted most was a good chunk of quiet. So I went to Milne's Porch & sat in mah comfy chair.

The night before me was kind of strange. The Moon seemed to be drifting across the sky instead of staying in place.

I was getting sleepy as I watched the Rebel Moon, & pretty soon I was asleep. I had a very strange dream.

The Moon wasn't drifting across the sky no more, but was coming right toward me! It kept getting bigger & bigger. Finally, I yelled, "Hey, Moon, stop crowding mah space!" Haha, sure, but I wasn't laughing then.

The Moon had a face & looked at me all big & kinda grumpy & said, "You! You're just a rash of life on the skin of my brother Ernie!"

"Who's Ernie?" I asked.

The Moon ignored mah question, & studied me closely. I didn't like the look the Moon had, like I was a tiny dot of inconvenience to be dabbed into oblivion.

I climbed out of mah chair & edged toward the window to mah bedroom. The Moon kept coming closer & closer as I slipped into mah bedroom & slammed the window shut.

I wondered what would happen if the Moon hit Bags End. It seemed a strange idea, so I got under mah bed covers & hid.

When I crawled out, it was daytime & the bully Rebel Moon was gone.

I was gonna sigh with relief when I realized it was Election Day.

"Oh, no," I groaned.

The only good part of Election Day was that Mister Owl said there was no school. I decided to venture out of mah warm unproblematic bed to see what madness abounded.

I came upon a crowd of Bags End guys. They held signs in their hands or paws. The signs had pictures of me!

I figured this was a trick of one of the big guys, so I ranned away. The whole crowd chased after me! I heard shouts of mah name & thought the end was near when one of the voices sounded just like Miss Chris!

Not one to be fooled by a fake voice, I ran up a level & hid in a shadow till I could be sure. Sure enough, there came Miss Chris! I ranned to her fast.

She had an "Algernon for Mayor" shirt on, & she yelled, "Yayy, Algernon! Vote for him!"

Before I could protest a word, I found that I was surrounded by cheering groupies.

I am a humble guy, ya know, & this was not mah scene. I thinked quickly & said,

"Hey, groupies, I was just going to see Sheila when you trapped me in your glee. Bring me to her, please?"

So Miss Chris & the groupies carried me to Sheila's Mayor's Office & went away still cheering, "Algernon for Mayor!"

Sheila was packing her carrots (O! Yuk!) & her jazz records in a big box.

"What are you doing here? Can't you wait till tomorrow to steal my office?" said Sheila, not grumpy at all. She looked at me with her sad wet purple eyes, & I knew she would never believe I didn't want to be Mayor.

So I just said, "Sorry, Sheila," & went sadly away.

I wandered the hallways of Bags End for a long time, thinking about all this. What tangled webs we weave when we attempt to clarify!

Finally, I knew what I had to do. I had to out-trick all the other candidates for Mayor. So I made mah plan, & went to see the Blondys.

The Blondys were all floating around the Ballot Box. They were there to prevent the tricks from working, like when Leo the Dark Man tried to vote twice, & Lisa tried to kidnap the Ballot Box & hide it in her diaper to get away.

I did mah vote for Sheila of course, & then told them that mah reporter's duty required me to hang around for the results.

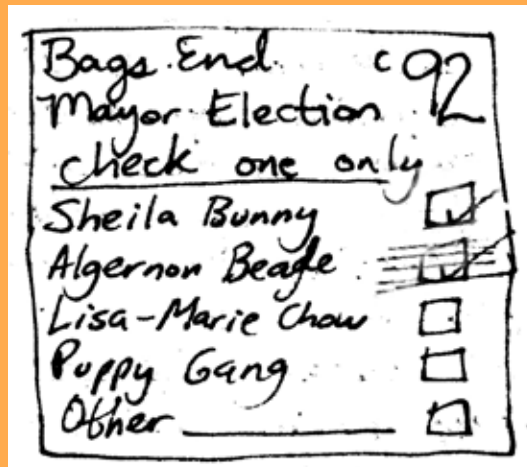
Finally, everyone voted, & the Blondys were floating down the hallway to count the votes in a Secret Blondy place only they know. I runned after then quickly.

"Hey, Blondys! I forgot to tell you something real important!" I yelled.

The Blondys came back & I told them I had to whisper them. They surrounded me real close & . . . BITE! I gave them a dose of the Babys!

Baby Blondys are real neat but they don't float too good. And they are not interested in elections or nothing like that. Just mostly playing with their toes as they sort of bounce up & down off the ground.

I had no time to play with them though. Quickly I opened the Ballot Box & changed all the votes for me to votes for Sheila:



Then I put all the votes back in the Ballot Box, & gave the Blondys 3 each a little kiss, & ranned real fast to mah comfy chair on Milne's Porch.

I sat there a long time rather relaxed for a fella who just left a lot trouble in his path.

The weird thing about trouble is that sometimes when you think it's stampeding your way, it never arrives. Of course, sometimes trouble plays ghost & boos! you loudly.

Anyway, only Sheila came to see me. It was funny her coming to see me when I usually go to see her.

She hopped onto Milne's Porch without a word & hopped over to the railing that guards the edge. I stay away from the edge if I can't help it.

"I won the election today," Sheila said, still staring at the sky.

"Hooray," I said quietly.

Now she turned & looked at me. "Why did you fool with the votes?"

"I don't want to be Mayor, Sheila," I said.

Sheila turned back to the sky. "Maybe I don't want to anymore either." I guessed she saw enough of the sky cuz now she left without a word.

I was kinda of upset when I heard a faint laugh of joy through my bedroom window. It was a Sheila laugh.

Ask me a question & I reply: I don't know, I don't know, I don't know why.

The election was truly strange. Did anyone but Sheila know what I did? Nobody said anything. I think the Blondys knew, but with some secrets their motto is "Deny Everything."

Miss Chris was sad I lost, but happy Sheila won. Mah former groupies gave me a collective "You're a loser" look, & de-groupied.

I kept mah own company for some days. I was kind of down by the whole thing. Bags End elections are usually more fun & less me.

I was sitting in mah chair on Milne's Porch when Sheila came to see me again. She had a small wrapped gift. "This is for you," she said, handing me the present.

It was pencils with little pictures of Sheila on them. There were words too, but I can't read words as good as pictures.

"They say, 'Compliments of Your King & Mayor, S.R. Bunny,'" Sheila said.

I am sure I looked very surprised.

"You're alright, Beagle," she said, & gaved me a little kiss on mah cheekbone.

"Well, goodbye," she finished, & left.

I felt better now, I guess. Beagles have mushy heart-bones but springy soul-bones.

I can say I am glad that election is over & I hope never to run for higher office than Mayor of Mah Own Abstruse Intentions, for a long time to come.



* * * * *



Martina Newberry

Philosophy

The bald man at the reading told me,
“You’re not particularly Existential, are you?”
I stuttered, “I guess not.”

But the truth is I am.
I do all the things the other Existentialists do:
I write, slip on icy sidewalks,
get lost on the freeway,
watch porno movies, spill mustard on my blouses,
sit in bird shit on park benches,
bang my head on cupboard doors,
burn my tongue on hot soup,
weep into the space where wind blows through.

*Maybe he couldn’t see it,
but I’m as Existential as the next guy.*

* * *

Otoño (Autumn)

A woman walks west on Hollywood Boulevard.

She wears flat shoes, baggy jeans. She is full of terror and longing.

She tries to remember her last good dream, but all she recalls is her recurrent nightmare:

*the one in which her belongings are lost and
she can't find her clothes to put on to go find them.
In the nightmare, she ventures out anyway,
holding a small hand towel in front of her naked body. The fear in this
nightmare is enough
to keep her honest.*

This woman is a loner. She loves museums, hates travel.

Sometimes she stops for a coffee and when a siren wails past:

*she wonders why her children cannot love her and why her new skin
cream isn't working and why a well-crafted, correctly metered line will not
save or even comfort the belittlement of age
or the failure of mythos.*

* * * * *





Hold on Loosely

[Travel Journal]

I heard the muzzle-loading shotgun fire. Giggling, Luis and Mecías came over and handed me a little gray bird with an orange beak and a spot of blood on its chest. A nunbird.

“Will you kill this for us?” Luis asked innocently.

I decapitated it with a kitchen knife. It died like a philosopher, stoic.

“What are you gonna do with it now?” I said, handing it back to the boy in two pieces.

“Pluck it and gut it and give it to our grandma for soup,” he said.

“There’s not much meat on it.”

“That’s true.”

“This might be the one that Wekopia showed to the tourists the other day.”

Luis nodded.

“Please don’t shoot any more birds around here, OK?”

Luis and Mecías nodded seriously, then wandered away, chattering and laughing, Luis with the shotgun slung over his back, Mecías bouncing the body in his cupped hands. I didn’t see what happened to the head.

Maribel just told me Yerbi—the little girl Joaquín did the ceremony to try to heal last week—has died.

Things to do around here

1. Leave your rubber boots on meter-high wooden stakes driven into the ground so their soles face the sky; this dries the boots and, if it rains, washes them.
2. Before you put on your boots, especially if they haven’t been left on stakes, shake them out, because there might be a tarantula or a scorpion in them.
3. Before you get into a hammock, brush the sand off the soles of your feet by rubbing them together, or against your ankles.
4. Worry that the dogs aren’t getting enough nutrition; feed them leftovers.
5. Protect your dry goods from insects and chickens—in jars, if possible.
6. Wash your clothes in the river and dry them on a wire clothesline.
7. Point with your lips.
8. On rainy nights, go down to the river every couple of hours and re-tether the canoe so it won’t be swept away by the rising water; afterwards, perform the operation in reverse so

the canoe won't be beached.

9. Watch the rain.

It keeps on falling harder.

It stopped.

The moment I wrote that, it began again. It's messing with me.

As I chop trees to clear land for a new garden, my hands blister. Rufino's 18-year-old son Fermín says, "*Es que Usted coge muy duro.*" *It's that you hold on very tightly.* "*Coje suave,*" he advises, *hold on loosely.* I nod. I have the same problem with women. I spit on my palms, hoist the axe, aim at the tree, hold on loosely, swing. The blade misses the spot I was aiming at by four inches.

With two weeks left until I have to leave the jungle, I want to have some experience and write something. I want to hold on loosely, but I can't.

Down by the river, toucans cry for everyone's lost innocence, and mention their sorrow at the dissolution of my parents' marriage. I appreciate that.

But it's hard to find time to write when I keep having to chase these chickens off the floor. Here in the Kaliyuga, the Hindu age of darkness and destruction, it's hard to do damn near anything. That's why we're being crushed by the forces of darkness—the forces of darkness and the chickens.

Still, moments of happiness break through now and then, as when the smell of an unseen flower charms one's nose on a sunlit path in the forest.

Rufino gave me a basic overview of Secoya yagé drinking. "When you drink yagé," he said, "you vomit up heaviness you've accumulated little by little over the course of living your life. This is both on a physical and spiritual level. The visions you see depend on your level of lightness. In the early stages, you see visions of the forest around you. Later, you and your visions rise up to the tops of the trees. And finally, a lot later, you graduate. That's when you reach the highest visions—the visions of the sky and the celestial regions.

"Up there's where the wiñawai live. They're kind of like angels, but they're much smaller and don't have wings. They're brilliantly multicolored, and they wear four crowns, one stacked up on top of another.

"They're doctors, just like ones in hospitals. When my dad heals someone, he doesn't perform the healing himself. The wiñawai do."

"Your dad has mentioned the wiñawai to me," I said. "But I have a question. Down here on earth, when I feel jaguar energy during a ceremony, it's because my visions are at the level of the forest around me, right? I get that. But what is it about jaguars and shamanism? Why jaguars? What do they mean? That time I drank with your dad and Lázaro, and I made all that noise, roaring, I felt their spirit, or their energy—like there was 'jaguar' all around, it

just wasn't in a body."

My questioning seemed to fly past Rufino, but it reminded him of something else. He said, "What surprised my mom and me was the ones that came to the other side of the river that night."

"What ones?"

"The jaguars that were roaring back at you."

"You're joking."

"Didn't you hear them?"

"No. You must have heard the echo of my voice."

"There were jaguars roaring back at you. I'm not talking about an echo."

"Really?"

"They were saying they wanted to be with you."

"*What!?*"

Been away from home nearly three months now. About ready to get back and sort things out with Deirdre. Too bad the shamanism thing hasn't been working out lately. That's how the cookie crumbles.

I wish I could meet up with those jaguars. If Rufino was right, maybe I should go out in the forest with a bottle of yagé and hang with them.

But maybe he was just pulling my leg.

Or trying to get me killed.

Help, get me out of here, I hate it. Nothing to eat today but piranha soup and aq. A bone stuck in my throat at dinner. Piranhas have millions of tiny bones. It's like they want to assassinate us from inside.

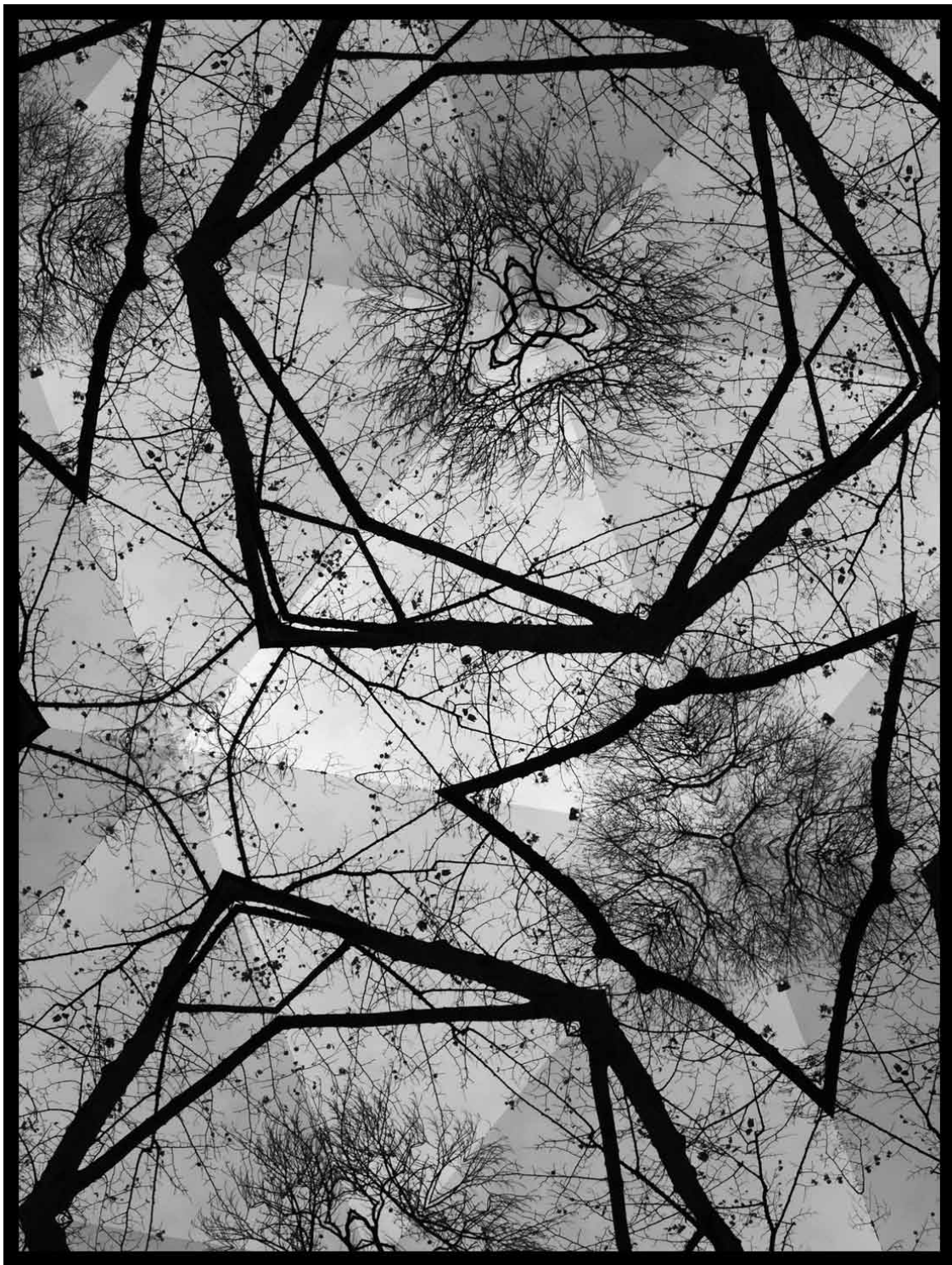
A pleasant walk on the beach at dusk with Rufino, Luis, Xiomara and Mecías. We saw parrots, toucans, swallows, and hawks. Rufino told me stories. First, about a being who lives in the forest downriver. "His name is Ho'rá. He's three meters tall, with black skin and shaggy black hair. He goes around naked. Sometimes with a backpack of woven palm leaves. He knows witchcraft and can turn himself invisible."

No shit, I thought.

"He's far enough away that he can't hear me talk about him, but around Cuyabeno, you can't say his name, because he might hear and come and kill you. He lives in a shelter between the buttress roots of a ceiba tree. He's got a sister. She knows magic too. She's as white as he is black, and as beautiful as he is ugly. She doesn't wear any clothes either."

Is she as tall as he is? I meant to ask, imagining a giant naked white lady, but Rufino remarked pensively, "Ho'rá's favorite food is armadillo. My mother and father have both seen him." And that was so weird that I forgot my question.

Rufino went on to tell me there used to be cases reported among the Secoyas of dolphins who'd follow an attractive person of the opposite sex and then change into human form and try to seduce them. The dolphins usually looked like whites, even to the point of wearing shoes



Nathan D. Horowitz

and smoking cigarettes.

“Really?” I asked. That was my eternal tough, probing question. I’d read that in the Peruvian rainforest, people believed in these were-dolphin Casanovas. When one transformed into a man to seduce a hot girl at a dance, he’d turn a stingray into a hat and wear it to hide his blowhole.

“The last time the Secoyas saw a dolphin like that was in 1949 or ’50,” Rufino said. “A family was paddling down the Wahoya. A tree trunk was sticking up out of the middle of the river, the way you see sometimes. A white man dressed in city clothes was sitting there, smoking a cigarette. Right in the middle of the river. He turned and smiled at the family, blew out smoke, flicked his cigarette off to one side and dove into the water. Seconds later, they saw a dolphin jump out of the water along the path of the guy’s dive.”

Rufino talked with his kids for a few minutes, then addressed me again. “We call the earth Yehá. That also means dirt. This land that we’re on, though—the continent of South America—we call Insí Hamú. That means ‘Pineapple Armadillo.’ It comes from a story about Ñañë. Ñañë’s our name for God. Long ago, Ñañë was married to two sisters. Muhú, or Thunder, stole Ñañë’s two wives from him, then invited everyone to a big party. Disguised as a diseased old man, Ñañë showed up at the party. He challenged Muhú to a contest. First, Ñañë would hang by his hands from a roof beam and Muhú would slash his belly with a bamboo sword.”

“A bamboo sword? How does that work?”

“A piece of bamboo this long,” Rufino said, “with the edge sharpened like a knife. Instead of using a spear, some of the groups around here used to fight with one in each hand. They’d rub the handle with tree sap to improve the grip. So Ñañë would hang by his hands from a roof beam and Muhú would slash his belly with a bamboo sword. Then they’d switch positions. Muhú agreed. Ñañë hung from the roof beam, and Muhú took a good swing, but the sword bounced off, as if it had hit solid rubber. Next, Muhú hung from the roof beam. When Ñañë swung, the sword sliced through Muhú as if he were made of water. The lower half of his body fell on the floor. Blood spurted out, and changed into little gray cuacuillo birds that flew away. Finally the corpse’s hands lost their grip and the top half of the body thudded to the floor.

“Of the two sisters, one of them loved Ñañë, but the other loved Muhú. She started crying and raging. She overturned the big clay pots of chicha, and the chicha merged with the tears that were pouring from her eyes like rivers. Soon the earth was flooding. Ñañë transformed the sister who loved him into a comb, and stuck her in his long hair. The water rose and rose until there was no ground left but a tiny patch he was standing on.

“Ñañë was thinking about whether to go to the trouble of creating the earth again when he saw something moving in the water in front of his feet. It was the armadillo, who was named Pineapple because of his shape. The armadillo swam up from underwater with some mud on his head. He went up to Ñañë’s feet and set the mud down on that tiny patch of land. He took a deep breath and dove down again. He came up with more mud. Deposited it. Dove down again. Ñañë watched for a few hours in silence as the patch of land slowly grew. Finally Ñañë decided. He tapped his foot on the small island, and *peen!*—the land stretched from horizon to horizon.

“But there were still no plants. The Spirit of Growth, Wiwati, happened to be passing by at that moment, and Ñañë asked him to speak his name. Wiwati said ‘Wiwati!’ and a completely new forest instantly sprang up. The forest was so thick it was impossible to move

through, so Ñañë went around and destroyed all the plants that weren't useful for anything."

That armadillo reminded me of the doctor who treated me when I swallowed all those aspirin back in boarding school—embodying the force that makes us not want to trash everything, but to protect and preserve. Even to heal.

I liked the story.

Still, I'm frustrated by how I haven't been learning about shamanism lately—especially since this is Cancotēcawë, the Season of Cicadas, when, as Serafín told me, the sky is closest to the earth, and spirits of the dead transform into birds and fly down to feed on ripe fruits in the trees.

But the armadillo and the doctor remind me to be patient.

Sometimes you get ceremonies, sometimes you get stories.

* * * * *



Nathan D. Horowitz

Colin James

The Moral Ambiguities of a Tall Person

An empty room.

The cave-like space
beneath the sink is covered
by a ludicrously dirty cloth.
A fold-up chair and tiny table
have been stored here.

When these are moved
to the center of the room,
things don't improve.

At least there was hope before,
now there is only sadness.

* * *

The Posthumous Behind

Objectified, she walks.

My head is in my hands,
a long way from useful participation,
having to send messages
that have no effect other
than arriving without consequence.

Ours is a shared sulk
through buildings of high art,
too high by society's subtle standards.

I'm buying lunch for the whole room,
after confirming it is conventionally empty.

Her steps by now sound very far away.

The last part of her to leave the room
stays with me as if it never left.

* * *

Conjugal Visits and the Rise in Absenteeism

Fried bread tied to a leather string
pings like a fetishist's wind chime.
It rattles all the lazy nerves,
awakens the spectacle of optimism.

Even with these adequate supplies,
adjusted for parables,
confirmation can not be.

Common sense says follow the river.
We attention seekers crave the isolation,
yet somehow are able to overcompensate,
& remain stoically unaware of the difference.

* * *

The Home Invasion Enthusiast

A cordon of papers prevents
the typical short-legged hop entrance.
Instead, a bent-over attitude prevails.
Ungrateful sighs are administered
during this telepathy of tact.

Spotless calm, as in nearly jammed.

Please direct me to the master bedroom,
I have a collection of curios to administer.
Your bedside table machine exemplifies a love-maker's whimsy.
See, everywhere, an army of offspring trackers,
or just smelly socks.

Needlessly, so much more of everything.

* * * * *





LSD's Impact on the Brain Revealed in Groundbreaking Images

[Essay]

Published in The Guardian, April 11, 2016.

<http://tinyurl.com/j534s9p>

The profound impact of LSD on the brain has been laid bare by the first modern scans of people high on the drug.

The images, taken from volunteers who agreed to take a trip in the name of science, have given researchers an unprecedented insight into the neural basis for effects produced by one of the most powerful drugs ever created.

A dose of the psychedelic substance—injected rather than dropped—unleashed a wave of changes that altered activity and connectivity across the brain. This has led scientists to new theories of visual hallucinations and the sense of oneness with the universe some users report.

The brain scans revealed that trippers experienced images through information drawn from many parts of their brains, and not just the visual cortex at the back of the head that normally processes visual information. Under the drug, regions once segregated spoke to one another.

Further images showed that other brain regions that usually form a network became more separated in a change that accompanied users' feelings of oneness with the world, a loss of personal identity called "ego dissolution."

David Nutt, the government's former drugs advisor, professor of neuropsychopharmacology at Imperial College London, and senior researcher on the study, said neuroscientists had waited 50 years for this moment. "This is to neuroscience what the Higgs boson was to particle physics," he said. "We didn't know how these profound effects were produced. It was too difficult to do. Scientists were either scared or couldn't be bothered to overcome the enormous hurdles to get this done."

LSD, or lysergic acid diethylamide, was first synthesized in 1938, but its extraordinary psychological properties did not become clear until 1943. Throughout the 1950s and '60s, the drug had a major impact on psychology and psychiatric research, but its adoption as a recreational drug and its influence on youth culture led to it being banned in the 1960s.

The outlawing of LSD had an immediate effect on scientific research and studies into its effects on the brain, and its potential therapeutic uses have been hampered ever since. The latest study was made possible through a crowdfunding campaign and The Beckley Foundation, which researches psychoactive substances.

With his colleague Robin Carhart-Harris, Nutt invited 20 physically and mentally healthy volunteers to attend a clinic on two separate days. One day they received an injection of 75mcg of LSD, and on the other they received a placebo instead.

Using three different brain imaging techniques, named arterial spin labelling, resting state MRI, and magnetoencephalography, the scientists measured blood flow, functional connections within and between brain networks, and brainwaves in the volunteers on and off the drug.

Carhart-Harris said that on LSD, scans suggested volunteers were "seeing with their

eyes shut,” though the images they reported were from their imaginations rather than the world outside. “We saw many more areas of the brain than normal were contributing to visual processing under LSD, even though volunteers’ eyes were closed,” he said. The more prominent the effect, the more intense people rated their dreamlike visions.

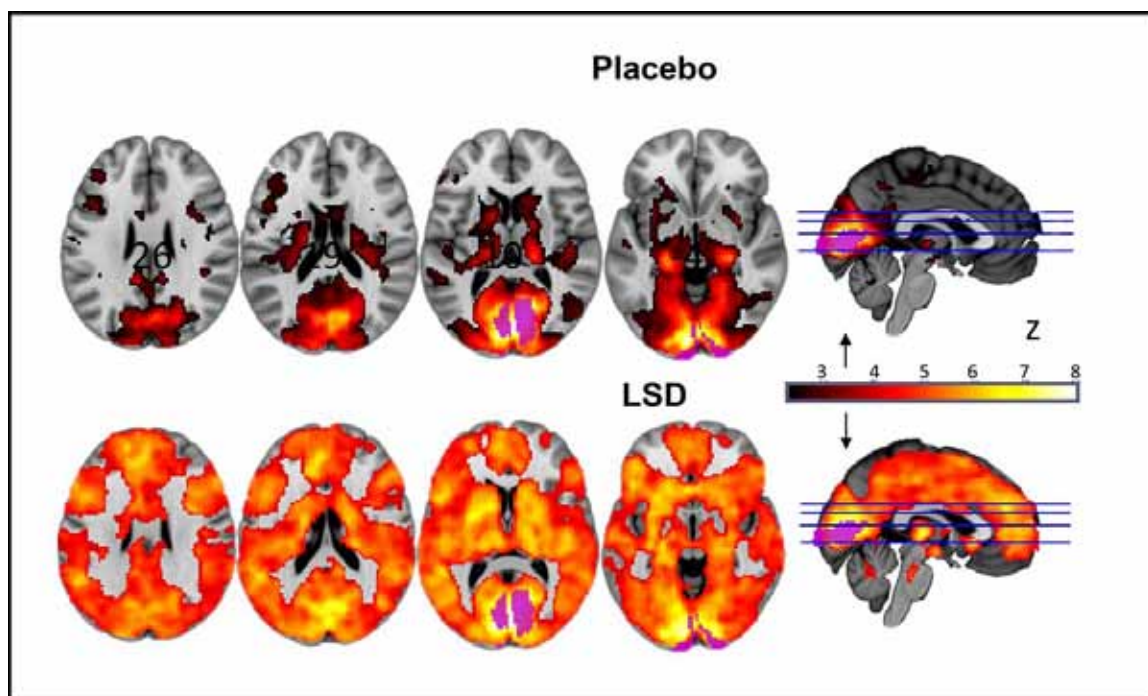
Under the influence, brain networks that deal with vision, attention, movement, and hearing became far more connected, leading to what looked like a “more unified brain,” he said. But at the same time, other networks broke down. Scans revealed a loss of connections between part of the brain called the parahippocampus and another region known as the retrosplenial cortex.

The effect could underpin the altered state of consciousness long linked to LSD, and the sense of the self-disintegrating and being replaced with a sense of oneness with others and nature. “This experience is sometimes framed in a religious or spiritual way, and seems to be associated with improvements in well-being after the drug’s effects have subsided,” Carhart-Harris said.

The drug can be seen as reversing the more restricted thinking we develop from infancy to adulthood, said Nutt, whose study appears in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.¹

The study could pave the way for LSD or related chemicals to be used to treat psychiatric disorders. Nutt said the drug could pull the brain out of thought patterns seen in depression and addiction through its effects on brain networks.

Amanda Feilding, director of the Beckley Foundation, said: “We are finally unveiling the brain mechanisms underlying the potential of LSD, not only to heal, but also to deepen our understanding of consciousness itself.”



1. Robin L. Carhart-Harris, P4853–4858, doi: 10.1073/pnas.1518377113
<http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1518377113>

Jimmy Heffernan**Desert Ruin**

Out here, this is Indian land
Sacred land.

The Cavalry visited this place
Desolate, empty now.

A bridge to nowhere, a wheel
How did they get here and why?

The desert hare looks on
Uninterested—

The rattlesnake looks on
Over toward the hare—

And this place, uncaring
Stretches to infinity—

Infinity is the only place
You'd find a scene as this—

These precious pearls of being, left alone
Are what make living possible.

Without them not to know about—
We'd have nothing.

* * *

Brain Fog

Grasping, holding on to absence
Feeling my way in calm reticence
Numbness, fearful uncertainty
Hell must be this eternally

Sharpness dulled atrociously
Frustration grows ferociously
Perception presently dissolves
Nothing, no one, can be here solved

Forget finding what appears right
Searching here one has no light
Better settle for what works
No muse exists that does here lurk

Sensitivity has died
Along with what one called one's pride
That soul who fancies himself:

Will be the one who falls victim
To the illusion of himself

* * *

On Creativity

Where do I begin?
There have been so many men
Who sought Calliope, only to find
A crashing, silent din

Beneath all structure
Mending all rupture
Is the light of the muses
Suffusing dark's puncture

All rhythm, all thought
Everything one is taught
Arises deep from the bed
Of the absence of naught

A fire, as it were
Light that doesn't blur
A clarity perfect
For existence to stir

The foundation, you see
Is not matter, or me
But an infinite spirit
Brings forth the verb, to be

We abstract from the motion
And build up a fine notion
Breaking up Nature's scaffold
Into a thinking man's potion

Yet undivided and flowing
Is Nature in her knowing
There is only the one
Though the many are showing

* * *

Dreamcatcher

Web-meshed eye
Texturing the field
Borderline invisible
Real sight revealed

Dreaming, waking
Sleeping while awake
Positioned inside-out
True perception is at stake

The rain dancer beseeches
That Mother Earth be kind
Whatever decision She reaches
Will soothe, assuage the mind

It isn't magic, *per se*
More like participation
How tragically today
They populate a reservation

As a single dual variable
The Dreamcatcher exists
No division in the mind of God
That in fallen man persists

* * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eleven

"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

i.

"Couple A & Couple B meet in college. Couple B are quarreling in the Student Center when they sit down at a table near Couple A, & they all happen to start talking. Couple B is prettier, Couple A is smarter. They switch up at points, becoming Couple C & Couple D, & two stray to Couple E & Couple F to form Couple G & Couple H, but eventually Couple A & Couple B reform.

"Some years after college, them going to the Red Sox games most weekends, one of them pulls off a coup: they win the 'Take a Swing Contest' & get to play against the Red Sox.

"First three all get singles, maybe the Red Sox are kind. The fourth one, though, smashes the ball just over the left fielder's glove, he slows it, wilds around for the ball, another rushes to help him, throw infield is wild though, & everyone scores, *an inside-the-park grand slam home run*.

"The Red Sox have to pay them \$10,000 total—\$2,500 for each run—plus \$10,000 donated to the local Jimmy Cancer Fund.

"Later, days, weeks, he sees a tiny blue light on the ceiling of their bedroom, brief & gone at first, then there for hours; he doesn't sleep, more & more, just watches; it affects things—"

These lines from Cosmic Early's *Aftermath: Dream Fragments Appendices*.

It's hard to say when he started writing these down, forming up something called "Dream Fragments Appendices." It's just . . .

he had long felt he was *done*, that he'd written what he had, the best of it, long past the best of it, & he'd sort of accepted it, figuring it was inevitable. But then . . .

Too many of these, they seemed more, seemed like they had value in them somehow—



Another, OK?

"I am with her again, after all these years, finally, naked in bed, her willing, & smiling, & ready, & there's 2 of me in this bed, & she's young still somehow, & she wants us both very much, her breasts are beautiful, her nipples hard, her mouth moist & smiling, how? It never happened then, not even a kiss, nor in the decades of dreams since, why this dream? Why 2 of us? She's eager, ready, wanting, time is out of the way, inhibition never was, just a good breath, a returning smile to hers, & begin, *begin anywhere*"

One more, this one convinced him to write them down:

"There is a little toad, escapes from its cup, is hopping around the crowded room of books & experiments, I make one move, another, & then suddenly sit on it, over it really, holding it under me, but unharmed, until I am able to nudge it back into its cup.

"It pokes its head above the rim of its cup, seeming calmer, but then it begins to croak, softly at first, slowly, & *oh so sadly*—its croak becoming a keen, a croon, a howl, a long, beautiful anguished howl"

Coughs. Hard. Twice more. Caps his pen. Looks over to his bed. Starts. Jazz is laying there, nude as is her habit, but her grey eyes are wide open, regarding him. A smile, mocking, ironic? Affectionate even?

"Hello," she says quietly.

I stare.

She smiles down at her nakedness.

"I'm not that big there."

I stare.

Suddenly laughing, she sits up. Leans forward. "I'm still cherry too," she hisses, with all the wicked delight possible.

*"Come together
Right now
Over me"*
—The Beatles, 1969.

ii.

I watch you, very small among the rest, across the train car aisle from me—
A small horse, pony? White, with little bits of gold dangling—

People get off; I dive across the aisle to sit near you. A man picks you up curiously, I snatch you away, this is a Creature, & I am here to Coordinate, to protect, especially when vulnerable, in danger—

You are with me, resting on my old bookbag, between my legs, & I don't care how the details of this occurred, I'm here to Coordinate, it's what I do—

But who am I to be suddenly upon these pages, pursuing my calling, but scribbling it down too?

It's to take us a few pages deeper in here. Get some ideas on the page's table—

It's the little colored books, mentioned on previous pages—

"You asked me if I can read them," says purple-eyed Maya to Christina & Kinley. "So we brought you the one who writes them," *we* being her intimacy with the Creatures, *the one* being me, having found myself drug here, I think dreaming, from where I live, near or in (I can't decide) the Creature Common.

Kinley smiles his kindly but way-too-sharp smile at me. "We've . . . met?"
 "One of us, I'm sure," I smile back.

Christina speaks up, me realizing this whole big book is quickly becoming familiar in my mind, even as I remain, distinctly, CC.

"Read us some stories, Mr. Author Man," she purrs about as sexy as those words can be said.

I don't join them in their row on the rock, but the ground I'm sitting on is dirtless & smooth, & a number of Creatures are sort of near me. I look down between my knees to consider.

The little horse is near my ankle, resting affectionately. He was made to be a purse, with a zipper down his back, where I found his missing eye too. He's been introduced to the Commonards of the Creature Common, & welcomed much.

I look up finally, nod, smile at them, begin to talk.

"There are several of me, even as we are the same. We look similar, not the same, live in different places, & times, & sometimes different ways."

I look around this wonderful Great Cavern. Its beautiful tree in the center, reaching to a heightless height. Its many Creatures.

"When I was young, there was distinctly one of me. I lived with my poor large family in a suburban neighborhood, & grew up mostly friendless & mocked for my clothes, my bad hygiene. I hid in books, in worlds of my own where I was admired, a hero.

"With my sister, & her toys & stuffed animals, I created a fantasyland, Bags End, inspired from the fantasy worlds I'd read about & loved. It grew vastly from its simple origins, & continues to do so these many years later.

"I left that life to live as a young man in the world of others, university & jobs & girlfriends. I left myself, a living, ongoing bit behind; like a leaf print, it remained alive & someone of its own.

"This second me began writing the stories that you are all in, though you came many years along. And there came eventually poems that twined with these stories too. But for years, they did not, nor did they very much twine with the Bags End stories. I was chasing through my world, writing & yearning what I did not have, did not yet know.

"Eventually, I had to leave again what I had come to know of the world. It began when I found magic medicines that showed me plainly what remained of me from my earlier self, & yet also pushed me forward, to try out the unfamiliar, sometimes dangerous. I traveled thousands of miles to chase love, Art, better, wholler truths."

I smile here. Quiet. They are listening. The Creatures are dozing. White Bunny. Hedgehog. Many bears. Small Giraffes. Shiny-eyed little ones. Asleep in my lap & I notice, in the laps of Kinley, Maya, & Christina.

“The facts of all this are less interesting than those truths. I lived for awhile in a room in a great house of rooms on a hill. My room was filled with candles & obscure trinkets from many places, many worlds. For awhile I owned a white-faced pink cat radio.”

I look at Maya & her 'witching smile warms me.

“I made a friend in that great house of many rooms on the hill. He was a nice brown bear who lived on the staircase landing. Nobody else noticed him—just another thing in a house full of them—

“But I did. I would sit with him, late at night, especially when I would come home late full of the magical medicine, happy with my pens & notebooks, but often unhappy with the world.

“He would listen, say little, enjoy my huggings, as all Creatures do.” Pause again. Remembering him.

“Come the time I had to go. The world of men is hard if you travel far, & alone. I came home late, very medicine'd, & climbed the stairs to sit with him.

“Next to him was a paper bag.”

“For your coming travels.”

“I looked inside. I saw the little books. Secret Books.” I gesture to them still around me, a Creature or two sort of protectively near each.

“Find stories to fill them with. As you look more & more, you'll be amazed.”

I held his paw & looked at these little books, their glittery covers folded around them, & held in place by a string hooked around a button.

“What if I don't?”

“My friend laughed. ‘Just travel on, & listen in every direction, with an open heart.’”

“I hugged him a long time. Till I heard two men laughing up the stairs in the kitchen. Bowie & Preacher, I think.”

Maya smiles even more 'witching at me. I continue.

“So I left. He had too, since he wasn't on the landing anymore that morning.”

Stop. Eyes closed. Remembering. More Creatures in my lap. White Tiger. Green Bullfrog.

“I had my black bookbag, strap on my shoulder, full of notebooks & music cassettes. Had my bag of little books. Had my beat blue suitcase, covered in Phish & Dead stickers.”

Christina & Kinley snicker, enjoying this.

“Twas a green Western city, full of hippies, hustlers, the poor & crazy. There was a store I'd passed by often, never gone in. Since I was leaving this city, I figured go in.

“Sort of a deeply cluttered thrift store. Murky. Weird, woodsy music in it. I'm not sure how long I

was in there. Got lost awhile, since the aisles warped this way & that, so it felt more like a maze than anything else.”

“Labyrinthine?” Kinley laughs.

I smile, nod. “Then I find a coat. Long, dark green. Thick but light material. Lots of pockets in its lining. I try it on. Feels natural & nice.

“What’s weird is I never find a cash register, or see anyone working there. By when I’m at the exit, the store is dark & quiet, so I just leave.”

Without a word, the three of them move off the flat rock, & we form a circle, the Secret Books within, Creatures lapped & nearby too.

“So now I put the little books in the pockets & traveled on my way. Got on the Greyhound bus with my bags & traveled far East.

“I listened to the stories of people I met along the way. Many were Travelers like me, looking, yearning unsure.

“It was one of these that told me of a festival up in the mountains. He was an old man with a long beard, severe dark eyes, but he saw me writing in my notebooks, saw me studying my blank little books, decided he saw a little something in me.

“‘Keep walking, humming lightly to yourself. Anything you are feeling, thinking. They will find you & bring you along.’ Nodded twice at me, smiled a sorta mostly toothless smile at me, turned back in his seat to doze.

“Did you go?” asked Christina, more prompting than anything.

I nod. “He’d told me what road to find, which direction to walk it, what dirt road sign to look for. I found them all near the end of a long day of walking.”

Remembering, smiling. “Turned from the paved road onto this dirt road in the twilight. This was it for me, I figured. I’d find them or get long lost in these pale woods.”

“White Woods?” they all ask.

I nod. “I didn’t know that, but yes. I didn’t know about the Hmmm either, but I did it. In my old long coat, full of little books, with my black bookbag & blue suitcase, I climbed that path *humming*.”

“Did they find you?”

“Well, I heard the drumming before anything. Deep, chanting drumming that quivered me down low. When I came to the clearing, up on a hill I looked down & saw the many fires too.”

I close my eyes, remembering more fully. “They were magical Woods, like all are in honesty, but especially so on nights when the moon is full. I strayed from the valley of fires, back into those Woods, uncertain. Nobody I passed was especially friendly to me, smiles, nods, pass by. I wondered why the old man had sent me here? What was I to find?

"I came upon a clearing, & a man & his campfire. Uncertain, even lonely for all the whoops & cries resounding the Woods, I walked up to him & said hello.

"His smile immediate, kind. He was drinking from an old metal tankard, or made of rock, & offered me a drink. I sipped. He nodded. I drank more fully. Stared into the fire for what seemed hours. I looked around & he was gone. The fire nearly cold.

"But the night was long still, & I let myself drift back toward those drums & fires. Found I was standing at a fair distance away, dancing as I could not remember having in a long time. My old, hungry, hurting, tired body let loose that night as I danced nearer & nearer the fire & drums.

"Until I was among the drummers, finding the strange quixotic beat & dancing my hands along with it, hours, days? More & more of me fell away, soon I was drift, was drums to the fire itself, dancing closer & away, closer & away, & finally took her bright fire embrace & died smiling, laughing like a complete fool! in her arms."

They are breathless listening & so I continue.

"Now I was free to move the miles & years at my pace, feeling my travels would be easier, & perhaps more fruitful.

"Years passed, & many miles, & I found myself in an empty room, sitting against a white wall. Head foggier than it had been ever.

"A noise. A cackle? I look down before me & there is a tiny little pandy bear. Great big crazy eyes, red & orange skirt. Cackling.

"I nod to her & she delighted makes away into the night, slowing for me to follow. We come up a hill to a very tall building, & she leads me into one of its dwellings. Quiet, dark.

"We walk a long hallway, with pictures on its walls. One of a red-haired fairy girl in a faerie grove. Another of a bicyclist riding toward a school. A third of a mountain reflected in a lily pond, & the last of a tall billboard depicting enigmatic figures walking down a long murky street.

"Each one reminded me of something, of a story, of many stories that I knew. I followed the imp down the hallway & into a dark room, a bedroom. Sleeping figures in a bed.

"This was my next self, my third self, who would be inspired to tell stories, the ones his earlier self knew in countless numbers. I would Author these tales & he would tell them to the magical Creatures he had gathered in his home with his beloved lady. He would be the Creature Coordinator."

I smile at all of them. "I am all of these, as they are me, as each is himself too. But you can call me CC, or Raymond, or even Ramie. They're all true."

Christina snickers, but it's a nice one for her.

"So you know these Secret Books well?" asks Kinley.

I nod.

"Do you want to tell us?" asks Maya, giving me full attention with her strange 'witching eyes.



Courtesy of *Norwegian Sky* Art Gallery

"It's a long story. Many, many stories, in truth, that wind in & around each other again & again. Characters come & go, & again, & some more. It's like the longest most complex & strange & beautiful dream you could imagine."

They lean forward. I jerk back, then laugh. OK.

I stand up, displacing some dozing Creatures from my lap, but gently. I nod to the White Bunny in particular & she hops ahead of us toward some unseen part of the Great Cavern. She knows my intent, being my Tender, & so I speak & follow trustingly.

"Well, I think it always starts here, with that cabin up there on that hill, with its adjacent garage. That is where the Traveler Daniel & his dear friend the Tumbleweed come to live, & the garage becomes their workshop.

"I always wondered if Kinley was really your last name," says Christina with loud delight. Kinley laughs too, despite himself, & they hold hands again & calm.

"And down there is the pond with its little fishin' hole, where he one fine day discovers the brother & sister Joe & Marie.

"And they move into his cabin, each to his own bedroom, then all to nurture & tend each other. Marie grows to become a schoolteacher, popular at the local school. Joe becomes a kind of Naturist, roaming these White Woods to tend harms & comfort the lonely & uncertain.

"Daniel & Tumbleweed set back to more of their travels as the years go on, & Marie & Joe are good without them. Their reunions are always happy, though, with the many stories Daniel has to tell.

"Then one morning, Marie pauses her readyings to walk to school by going into Daniel's workshop to find a book. About Alternative History, one of his favorite topics. She wants to discuss it with her students."

"Alternative History?" asks Christina, again fondly glaring at Kinley. He in turn peers hard at me for more of a definition.

I nod & try. "It's the belief that history is not on a single line. It's like a field of wild weeds & flowers, no single start, no sure finish, & possibilities countless at every moment." Kinley listens closely, piercingly. Nods, says nothing.

"She finds the book & then walks down to the fishin' hole to find a few good pages to read to her students. Sits on the grass, reads, reads; suddenly fatigued despite a good night's sleep, she stretches out on the warm green grass & falls into a nap.

"In her dream, she wakes up, & looks up, & the mountain that had always reflected its handsome image in her pond was gone. Completely. Yet still its reflections in the pond.

"Shocked, dismayed, yet still she lays back down & falls into a deeper dream. In this dream, she is deep in a strange Woods in a clearing full of Faeries, floating in a cloud around her. She discovers herself playing a flute which is summoning them more & more.

“Please! Perhaps it’s just a dream? But my mountain is missing! Can you help me find it?”

The Faery Cloud spoke with one voice. “Here, Marie, your longed-for Travels begin. But for your journey to begin well, you need a companion, & a song.”

“And Marie finds herself knowing & humming something that feels known from deep within her, & yet new. And before her sits a long-eared White Bunny, kind, fiercely intelligent eyes. She hears the word ‘MeZmer’ in her mind.”

I smile at them. “Shall I go on?”

They nod eagerly. “We follow Marie & MeZmer as they walk & hop from that Faerie clearing in search of Marie’s mountain, & other travels & adventures.”

We are back sitting in the Great Cavern, Christina sleeping in Kinley’s arms. I find Maya in mine, start, but it’s OK.

“It’s quite a story.”

“Yes.”

“Why do you tell it?”

“This one or that one?”

“All of them.”

“I don’t know. I suppose it’s to make my interior worlds, its spectres & memories & weird dreams, manifest in the world I live in. Tell what I can, feel not so strange & alone.”

He listens, thinks, nods. Yawns.

I listen to them all sleeping peacefully, among these strange & beautiful Creatures. All my making? More like, I just coordinate the many songs, into a braided *Hmmm*, of sorts, & sing it best I can. (I too doze.)

Dreaming, I drift along as sometimes dreams do, but then I begin to sense a world around me, my own body, or dream-body, moving within it, the air cool on my face & hands, me dressed in a black knit cap, like an old thick one I’d found on a bus or in a thrift shop, a black shirt with graphic cartoon Beatles on it, & an old button-down cotton jacket, dark blue, raggedy, even moreso my leather jacket, not much less my blue jeans, black sneakers & socks, Lennonspecs on my face, hair longish, unshaven, not quite walking, not quite not, tis night & yet I move easily & no stumbles, tis the *hmmm* I realize is deep in my throat, guiding me along these White Woods safely, & I am safe here, I realize, I am approaching something, somewhere noisy & exciting, somewhere I have been before, a clearing, a great clearing filled with tiny individuals I would ordinarily not see visibly—

They look at me familiarly, affectionately, as I walk-float among their numbers, & I dare & allow myself to study the faces I pass amongst, each one unique of course, they are shaped like people in each having a head & torso but their faces seem naturally furred all over, each its own variation of color, their eyes larger than those of men, noses & mouths smaller though, to compensate, their clothes strange upon them as though they do not fully reckon why to wear them, their hands with furry fingers but their feet more the climbing, grasping paws of monkeys, thin antennae on their heads? Tails behind them? I’m not sure, but their faces are kind, are sweet, there is no one these little beings would not welcome to their gatherings like this, none they would not wish to friend—

Their pleasure I am among them but their attention way up ahead toward what looks like a stage atop a platform, & some kind of production going on upon it, why is this familiar & not both? They

welcome me, I feel pulled by my heart & open hands toward all of them & yet a sort of blurriness in it all, allowing myself to continue walk-floating along toward that stage-platform, sliding to one side of it to arrive at a set of stairs that I climb-float up to arrive to much shouting & applause from all my friends down there, & find in my arms a White Bunny, a little grey Hedgehog, a little flowery-decorated bear fella, & a shaggy green fellow, & they are looking up at me to continue, *continue what?* I open my mouth curious what will come out, nothing at first, until I notice I am standing before the picture of Marie in the Faeries clearing, & of course I speak—

“MeZmer leads Marie into a Crystal Cave impossibly high & lit up by brilliant Faerie lights of all many different colors, & Marie feels the song she had learned *humming* out of her mouth, skin, all of her, becomes the *Hmmm* in this Crystal Cave, & lost to the world but this until MeZmer nudges her back to wake & follow her hand in paw as they hop & walk into a smaller cave & meet up with a smiling monkey fellow who leads Marie to a place of pillows & a soft Brown Bear Blanket, whose Bears watched her closely, guarding her now that she & MeZmer warm underneath, leading them into deeper dream, where the glowing fissure in the wall nearby is clear & they can stand & together walk & hop through it, a long glowing hallway, the sounds of the Sea, the wide, wide Sea, & they come out to its beauty—

“On the beach they walk & hop along the great waves until they come upon two little black birds sitting calmly on a wire running from nowhere to seeming nowhere, & Marie speaks, because this is what one does amongst Faeries & Dreams: ‘I am looking for my missing mountain. Can you help me?’ The birds look down calmly ‘pon her a long while, then say as one voice, ‘Miss Marie, you must go into the Sea!’ & are again silent, & Marie uncertain this advice until she notices the glowing White Bunny that is her companion now (also now glowing in my arms) &, hand in paw, they walk & hop untroubled into the Sea!”

Take a breath. The Thought Fleas, I now know enough again to know their kind’s name, cheer & cheer my telling, & seem to want more, & so I move along the stage-set to the next picture on the wall, a bicyclist riding toward a school, traffic light & tree’d street—

I stare at this picture unknowing awhile, until I feel an itch in my mind, something, something? Helping me, I relax to it, let it come like fresh bright waters into my darkened mind, let them come, & words & pictures & yes, OK, I’ve got it, I think I’ve got it now, it’s Joe on that bike, Marie’s brother, of course it’s Joe, & he’s riding to see her, & I speak & speak: “Joe is Marie’s brother & is riding his bike to her school to bring her fruits for her lunch, but she is not there & he wonders why she stayed home, she’d seemed OK this morning, getting ready to go, & he is getting back on his bike now, & riding back to where they live to find her, check on her, when on the road he sees before him a grey Hedgehog, squeaking excitedly up at him—(& in my arms)

“Joe stops, & feels compelled to lean down & to put his hand low so the Hedgehog can climb on, & find his place on Joe’s shoulder, squeaking him to ride on now, & Joe does, rides & rides, until there on the road is a large pipe with a dark opening, & Holly urges Joe to ride on in, & he does, the pipe takes on a glowing quality as he rides in, as though it’s turned on, & they ride & ride, Joe getting ever uneasy, until they roll out back into the White Woods, yet the trees seem so much greater in size, & this is confirmed when coming up to him are two ladybugs nearly as big as him! But their faces are friendly & they urge him to follow them a long stretch through now-pathless White Woods until they come to a clearing where waits a great red & yellow Truckee waiting for them, & they climb in his Truckee bed to begin riding along, Joe, Holly, bicycle, Ladybugs & all—”

Pause, a breath, continue. “They roll along until they come in view of a great mountain, ‘Tis Marie’s!”

Joe explains, not knowing Marie was missing it somehow, & they roll on up it, a bumpy course, for a long while, until the ground below them gets smooth, soft, & soon they are not rolling but sinking deep into a kind of weightless quick sand, & down, & down, & down, & unharmed, & arrive to somewhere further up the mountain than they'd been, & rolling again among trees to arrive shortly at the small furred cabin of two pup brothers, the golden one sees & greets them, he is Shelley, & coming out now is his sober-faced puggle brother Threshold, & Joe is introducing them all & telling his search for his sister Marie, & the help he thinks his new friends are trying to offer—

“You are Joe? Do you know Daniel the Great Traveler?”

“He is our Guardian.”

“The golden one goes into the furred hut & returns back with a map. ‘He & his Tumbleweed companion visited us once. Told us of their many travels. Left us with this map for if we two ever chose to travel. He said we should make a wish for who or what we wished to near, & then open the map, & it would reveal our path.’

“Both pups look fondly at Joe & his friends. ‘We are where we wish to be, so we pass along this gift to you.’

“Joe thanked them & took the map. Held it a moment, closed his eyes, & wished to near Marie so he could make sure she was safe. In his mind, he could see her red hair & turquoise eyes, smiling. Opened his eyes, unrolled the map—

“Revealed was the mountain they were on, & on its other side a path leading down to the wide, wide Sea, & Joe could see that was how they should travel to near Marie. He showed his friends the map, & the Truckee in particular, & they all got into the truck bed in the back, & waved goodbye to the kind brothers as they followed the prescribed path away over the mountains & down, down to the wide wide Sea, where they rolled along the beach for a long time until they too came to To and Go the little black birds on the strange endless wire—

“Joe told of his search & held the map up for them to see, & hoped he was not being foolish asking the silent birds for their counsel—

“‘Kind Joe, friend to many & caretaker of the vulnerable, you must . . . go into the Sea!’ they said in one braided voice, then silent again.

“Joe looked to the crashing waves nearby, then back to the birds, then at his friends, & he nodded & raised his hand for the Truckee to go, saying thankee to the birds. Luckily his friends pulled him under the pink scarf they had been nestled amongst as the Truckee rolled steady in & amongst the wild waves of the wide, wide Sea.”

I stop. The Thought Fleas cheer & applaud even more for me, & I think I wish Kinley & Christina & Maya were here, & I see them suddenly among the figures in the front row, first Christina's tight shirt over her sexy tits, long blonde hair, & then Maya's-pink striped blonde hair, & finally Kinley taller than them, & every Thought Flea in the place too. Sleeping? Waking? I give a vague wave to acknowledge the cheering & move on to the next picture, wait for the itch, it comes, study the picture before me, its reflection of a great mountain in a lily pond, peaceful, strange, speak:

“Buddy & Cuke hurried through the White Woods, looking for their friend MeZmer the White Bunny, who had promised them hopping lessons on this pretty cool morning, but she was not to be found,

when instead these friends came to a great clearing filled with cheering & happy Thought Fleas—”

And here the Thought Fleas before me cheer & cheer, & the Buddy & Cuke in my grasp nudge & nudge me until I raise them up, & all cheer & cheer some more—

“On the stage performing his famous dance routine is none other than Bauer the Bear, who dances & slides from one end of the stage to the other, a star if ever there was one, eventually encouraging many Thought Fleas to come up on stage & dance with him, or hang on as he slides back & forth again & again—

“When his act is done, Buddy & Cuke come up on stage to greet their old friend, & he invites them to join him for a resting nap in the shack nearby.

“I do enjoy dancing for the crowds but I also miss my old dancing partner Shatzi,’ says Bauer as they walk, his gruff bemused voice also a little sad. They come to the shack, the hammock within, & they cluster together, old friends &, as Creatures often do, share a dream.

“In their dream, they find themselves in the cave of Jacoby the little monkey fellow who Marie & MeZmer had met, & he is delighted to see them. He is excitedly unrolling a map on the floor of his cave to show them something very important.

““This is the stage in the Great Clearing, & at the side of the stage is a door you wish to find,’ he said.

““Why?’ asks Bauer the Bear.

“Jacoby laughed. ‘Through it, you will find the way to rediscover your friend Shatzi!’

“‘He disappeared after a show,’ Bauer explains. ‘He’d fallen hard but said he was OK. But I could not find him.’

“Jacoby made them study the map closely & then they woke up.

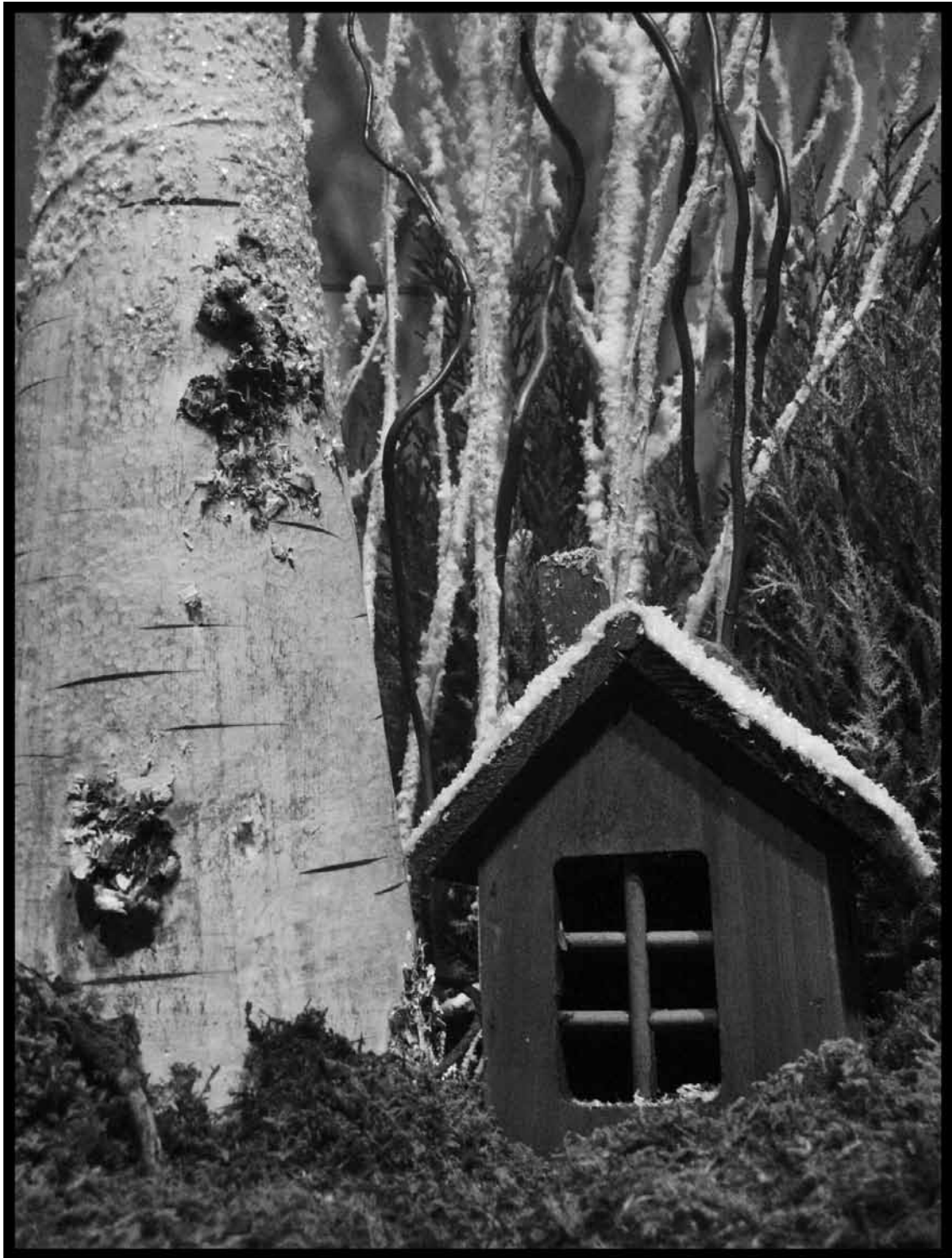
“Bauer was so excited that he ran them back to the stage, & all three of them looked high & low for the door to find Shatzi. But no luck, & more no luck. They finally sat sadly side by side on the stage.

“Then there was the sound of singing at the far end of the clearing, among the trees. A wondrous site to see. The famous Singing Toes, ten of them, singing a song for Bauer the Bear.

And in this Great Clearing there is the sound of song at the far end of the clearing & we all hear the prettiest one-none-many voice singing the song for Bauer the Bear, & I fully now remember: this Grand Production occurred & it was like this? Why am I back here, in dream, with Kinley, Christina, & Maya?

They sing:

*You must go into the Sea!
Go into the Sea! Go into the Sea!
Bauer & Buddy & Cuke, friends three!
You must go into the Sea,
to find the long lost Dancing Shatzi!*



*You must dance your way there
Paws high, tipling on the air!
You must dance & dance & dance
Bauer the Dancing Bear!*

*Go into the Sea! Go into the Sea!
Dance & dance & dance your way!
Find your friend, dance away!
Go into the Sea!*

Of course the applause for this star turn was long & loving, & from the crowd appeared himself Bauer the Bear to whom I handed Buddy & Cuke, while I stood off stage with MeZmer & Holly, watching & amazing—

Bauer danced with his friends in paw, danced & slided, & danced & slided across the stage, with such talent & deep wishings that a door unseen revealed as promised, & he danced himself & his friends right . . . straight . . . through!

They found themselves arrived to the beach along the wide, wide Sea, as had Marie's & Joe's crews before them, & there was on that strange high wire above them the black birds To & Go!

The birds were singing, singing the Famous Ladys Toe song, as their own advice too—

*Go into the Sea! Go into the Sea!
Dance & dance & dance your way!
Find your friend, dance away!
Go into the Sea!*

“And lucky just then appeared on the waves two bloo-eyed kittees in a sturdy Boat-Wagon to take them on board, buckle them up (Safety First!), & take them away into the Sea!” I said in conclusion.

I was exhausted with this dream, though the applause was exciting, & I was sorta slumping on to the next picture when I saw coming onto the stage my good friend Kinley!

Cheers & cheers, of course. Held out his hands, & I gave him over MeZmer, Holly, & Buddy & Cuke—all of whom back in my grasp, strangely now his—

Studied the fourth picture on the hallway wall of the stage set. A photo of a great billboard painting, a long mysterious street with strange figures among its buildings—

“My dear friend the Tumbleweed & I found ourselves deep in the desert, negotiating with some ruffians for a map we desired, but they seemed more interested in taking our goods off of us, so I raised my finger, TW *hmmm*d below their level of hearing for them to still, & I unrolled one of my maps to show them something valuable & wondrous. Mumbled ‘Fondo Wondo!’ & stroked an image on the map. Suddenly lightning ripped the skies above us, & a half dozen rainbows wilded amongst them, & they panicked & backed away from us till at a flick of my finger, they ran off fast.

“‘Good thing they fell for simple weather tricks!’ cracked TW in my mind, as I laughed, rolled up old & new maps, & we were away for a new destination. Days to find the town of the map. And the billboard.

"We stood before it, map in my hands, me muttering the words there to read, & we tumbled back into the billboard, & arrived to the street. But no time to celebrate. Strange figures took us into custody right away, & brought us down that long murky street to the jail at the end of it.

"Door slammed. Night came. Quiet. Nodded in our shared mind-tongue, & we tumbled back again.

"Sounds of the . . . wide, wide Sea. A long sandy beach, sang when walked on. Till we came to the two little black birds on their endless wire in the sky."

Kinley pauses, a dramatic moment. Everyone began to cheer & cheer & cheer for more.

Kinley smiled & said, briefly, "We looked up at them, they down at us. I said, 'Hello, I am Daniel. This is Tumbleweed. We are Travelers.'"

And, suddenly, almost violently, we all wake up back in the Great Cavern!

iii.

Watch this, call it a demonstration & here goes:

1. It was yellow onions that helped our task finally. They are loosely related to time-space, so can be used to transport material across unimaginable spaces & times—they simply arrive where & when needed, bearing within what organic material is needed—healthy cells for sick ones, as an example—information as yet unexpressed out loud—
2. I did this kind of work, we called ourselves the "onion truckers," because we got the orders, prepped the onions, off they went—did this kind of work until I found myself naked, standing in a featureless white room—I guessed a spaceship—
3. A voice explains directly to my brain, bone, & blood that we are each & all part of a neural network flow, that humanity has been preserved entirely as data, & my choice to join the big, green, beautiful virtual world outside this room—
4. I turn my head away, hard, in a gesture I'd learned in a dream—it went like this—
I am an old woman, traveling alone in the after, until I meet a young girl with a bag of yellow onions, her eyes are dark, her hair dark also, thick & long, & she sings of these onions along this empty star-flooded night road, sings:

*Travel with me,
Travel free, free!*

She walks alongside me on this road, as I push my shopping cart, smiles uncertainly, speaks:

"You may cheat back on old age, ma'am, with one of my yellow onions. Restore your flesh from years ago! Become young & pretty like me!"

5. I stop pushing my cart & look at her. "Do you remember how I found you behind that great mask, hid in that wall on my family's estate?"

She nods. Shyly. I gesture her now. She removes her cloak slowly, lets it fall upon the road. Nod again, & she unbuttons her shirt, lets it fall. Her breasts are young, pretty, nipples hard at the sudden night air.

Nod again. Quivering, she slides off her skirt.

“Look down.”

Shakes her head. Eyes tight shut.

“*Look down.*”

Her legs meet at a featureless root.

“Now show me.”

Head shakes.

“*Show me.*”

She looks at my face, at my now hungry eyes, unmoving from her own, & the featureless root begins to soften, divide, deepen—

6. I can't go back where I came from, to my fellow onion drivers, & it's hard going for awhile until I find myself in an ancient coffeehouse, across a strange gaming board from a man offering me a device that sums up others, their dreams, truths, useable data, tis easily portable—
7. I nod & say *let me try it*, walk deeper into this coffeehouse, looking for someone who hasn't been out of it in a long time, & I find a girl, long dark hair, dark eyes, absent her beautiful body because its ability to mold to a lover's wish has long since traumatized her heart, & I use this device to delve deeper into it, this deep black heartbreak, & see there, on a table, in a clean morning kitchen, a yellow onion, & I nod, & I pull, & I pull harder, & she holds it in her hand, & her choice now—
8. I travel what some call the White Woods, & others the One Woods, travel somewhat by dream, it's how to cover great distances, some of them dreaming, I've learned of something in them, someone, one & many someones, a sort of laughing cryptic puzzle of a little being, looks like a tiny black & white pandy bear, big laughing eyes, red & orange skirt, I see her/them often, but never close enough to hold, to talk to—yet I seem to accumulate them somehow—she/they follow me in greater number, curious about me, wondering what games I would play—
9. The world washes past me, I can see its great movements of land, of men, how it shifts & again & again through hurtling space—
10. Eventually I wonder about my other selves, & needing to speed, & sniff deeply, I form more into a White Bunny than a man, & I/we travel the One White Woods & accumulate us as we hop faster & faster, grow smarter, but then less smart, far more tender, far far more tender—
11. Come to a great city, re-shaped as girl, come to a party, sort of a great loft apartment, I feel strangely shaped for viewing, my chest & hips emphasized, my eyes overly large, my lips wet without licking, the clothes on me a conversation along the quick path to a bed, but the yellow onion in my hand, & so I have a drawing pad & several long charcoals, I sketch the laughing, stoned, delighted faces around me, look up, nod to one, “push the button”—hesitates—“*push it!*”
12. The faces on the page begin to move, to change, take on fuller forms, there are shapes & setting

around them, what is it? *What is it?* A bookstore, oh, goodness, *can that be?*

13. I'm working at a used bookstore, as a second job at night, just started, mostly at the cash register, ringing up sale after sale, some have great piles of books, there's this one girl who buys mountains of those thin paperbacked Westerns, writing a paper on them?

The store is along a busy city avenue, its great front door open till late to all, & its second floor with its mysterious glass walkway, closed off to the public, yet figures do use it to cross to . . . somewhere—

It's late, closing down, cleaning up, & one guy I'm talking to wants to carry on the night, I demur to another night—& the girl who wants to bring me out for a drink too—

I smile. "You're too Zelda Fitzgerald for me. Wouldn't work."

I have my book, I'm walking out the front door. I'm very happy. It's a great store. They like me. I feel like I belong.

14. The avenue is still alive as I walk it that first night, happy, & I see a crowded square, many people yelling & clapping & a sign up high says, "James McGunn performs *Sco'u'tland*, midnight!"

15. Thirsty I step into a store & to a refrigerator of bottled juice drinks, but in front of it, stomping in a puddle, is one of those tiny pandy bears, crying out, again & again, "I want to buy the English!"

16. I sit down to read my book to the imp, she cackles, calms, & listens:

"At the cartoon end of the world, a signal finally reaches the trees, & they burst out from their roots to up & save the world!"

17. Suddenly wake. A big warm blanketed bed. But the smell of a hospital. I don't know who I am & panic. My book lies face down on my blanket. I open it up at random & read aloud:

"Wars of the future will be fought in the mind, via drugs, dreams, television, Internet, sex, persuasion, manipulations of loyalties to the point where to obey is to receive pleasure & endorsement, & to disobey is to receive nothing as punishment. All war & physical suffering eliminated at the simple cost of freedom & self-created identity. Sleepers emerged from this doomed, damaged epoch—"

18. Close my eyes again, try to remember, understand, how it was easy, made no sense, but the music & the laughter & all shot through with want, but something more, I cared, the world interested me, I still, then, no, never, yellow onion, feel myself lower & lower, edge in, in deeper:

19. "Somehow deep down in the heart of things, a speck, like a piece of dandruff."

20. Till I am an old man, & knowing so many things, & a young woman keeps me traveling along, won't let me slow, & stiffen, our travels open out to others—

iv.

Since it was a sort of interval before they were next up, Bowie told Iris the story of one of his strangest operations:

“It was in a hotel room, a big one, like an apartment,” his fingers twined hers, she smirks—

“Preacher & I were trying to tease something from the air in that room, expose it. He brought in heavy cases, of ants & mantises & hummingbirds & so on.”

“Why?”

“We had this light device, I called it our ‘football’ because of its shape. Most evaporated, but maybe not all—& these hurry ‘home’—”

“Hurry home?”

“That’s what we were looking for, Iris, where they would go to.”

“And?”

Bowie shrugs. “It didn’t work out. They were too clever for us.”

Then he laughs. A pause then she laughs.

Spy humor.

v.

I am walking through a series of old factory buildings, again, wide dark alleys between them, & I need to piss, this slows me, as it has previous times, but insistent, so I look every which way, there’s “BAR” as it usually is, narrow red door, neon sign on a blacked-out window next to it—the door sticks, but I vaguely recall: two hard kicks low, & a push high. *Peasy easy.*

Dark place, bar against one wall, toilet against the other, just a rickety stall around a toilet, I hurry in, prop the garbage can lid against the door, sit hurriedly to let it flow, but a bloomy scent & a woman is trying to push in—some relief, not enough—

Back of the bar is murky black & open-ended, & again I choose to go deeper, sorta remembering something—

There—another bathroom stall—rest of my piss waits—door has a working lock too—but more—a vast space inside this bathroom—a banquet hall, & by my orders they are setting up an event—first the piss—*ahhhhh*—now I’m ready—

The hall fills as I walk around, glances at me but shy or circumspect, nobody willing to speak to me up close—

I am uncertain. That’s new. I’m reluctant. Why? The hall is full. There’s excitement. There’s a pinkish-blue smoke, opiate? Ganja? I don’t know.

I don’t know. I retreat back to the bathroom stall. Sit, pants still on. Close my eyes, try to gather myself close within.

“Global.” I start. Don’t move.



“Global Wall.” Still don’t move.

Bloomy scent again, no, several. These are not chemicals but skin. Young flesh. Scents I know. Scents I love.

“We know you can do this.”

I open my eyes. They aren’t there. Just scents in my mind.

“This is how you are protecting us. We’re in Dreamland guarded by Benny. Your promise to visit every night.”

I nod, remember. Remember it all now.

After the radio station, after I broke them one & several, I drove them in our electric van out to the town where my past was buried.

It was cold, winter, the cemetery empty of the living save us.

The marker I’d paid for was blank. Under a white birch, no other stones nearby. I’d paid for several plots to gird this one blank stone.

They were quiet, subdued. Still gathering themselves new from the radio station. I loved them, I cared for them, but I was no longer obsessed with their possibilities. *I needed to see Benny.*

“Who is this?” asks the youngest one finally, who speaks out of some group-mind consent of theirs.

I look at her, enjoy her blunt crimson-eyed return back at me. That long furred overcoat covers nothing from my body’s memory of her. Of them, she still resisted me the most.

I’m silent a long time. “Me. I’m buried here.”
Does not defer to me with a raised brow or a question.

“It was the only way I could leave my life behind.”

Sarah, the dark-haired middle one, still likes me despite, still remembers our swim, speaks. “It’s really you? I don’t understand.”

“I iterated. Benny taught me how.”

She, they, flinch at Benny’s name. Know that’s who I’m bringing them to.

I continue. “My life’s path led to here. Dig up the bones, find me. End of search.”

“Why did we come here?” asks the oldest one, the one of them I first had. Never really accepted sharing me with the others. Disliked most the four of us no longer sleeping together.

I sigh. “Because it’s where you’ll bring anyone who you need to show that I am dead. It’s your insurance.”

They say nothing yet clearly dislike this. I kneel before the stone, touch its cold surface with my hand. Brief image an icy apocalypse in my mind, shake it hard away. I feel them behind me twitch toward &

away from me. No longer feeling permitted.

Walk back to the electric van, pull open the back sliding door for them, & get in the driver's seat. They follow slowly, wondering if the buried one of me would like them better.

I can't right now. We have to get to Benny. *Get? To a man of dreams?* I need somewhere to hide them, whilst they sleep perpetually, until I fetch them again. Which I intend.

It means traveling in the White Woods again, one of the few roads that pass through it, & knowing that once they are safe, I won't be, & Benny & they will be far from me for safety. Then I can do what's on my mind.

I don't say much as we drive along, don't play the radio, which they would like.

And finally come to where no road continues, we get out, & I leave the van unlocked. May not see it again.

They are scared of all this, of being left, of where I will go without them, of what it all means.

I look around these darkening Woods, & motion all to take hands, mine the oldest one's, & I lead them along, *humming* a melody Benny had long ago taught me, for getting somewhere desired in these Woods—

We walk & walk as a great full moon comes out, & the White Woods braids through my low *humming* many, many times over, & I hear my girls join in, feel their voices lift their hearts & hopes & I love them, *I love them*. I will *protect* them, & return to them soon, it's OK, better than OK, *it's good, he loves us, he loves me, he loves us all*—

We arrive to a cabin on a hill above a moonlight drenched pond, but I lead them further into a smaller building, sort of a workshop from the tables & tools that fill it—there's a rough wooden stairs, & at the top is a fishing wire hanging from the ceiling, & pull it down a door unfolds, & climb up, & behold a whole new world, this one path into Dreamland, beyond the illusion of sleeping & waking—"Here we are, my loves" —

vi.

Bowie tells Iris another story, since her 'witching smile springs upon him.

"It was before I was really a spy."

"There was a before?"

"I was waiting, Iris. I was young & uncertain & I was waiting. I didn't know that's what life can become."

"Waiting?"

"As long as you're not in someone else's way, or part of their plan."

"And you weren't?"

"Not yet."

Iris thinks. A waiting Bowie is hard for her to conjure.

"I worked a job."

"You? A job?"

Laughs, agrees. "I don't know what I did. Moving boxes, shifting numbers, greeting strangers welcome?" Irish laughs some more.

"This girl & I discovered we got our groceries in the same store."

"Girl, Bowie?"

"It didn't seem like that. She would give me a ride home in her car when she'd see me walking along the road with my bags of groceries."

"Seem?"

"Then she invited me to visit her one time. She said she made a mean pink lemonade."

Iris laughs. "Pretty?"

"She had a girlfriend I met that day."

"Even better!"

"And an ex-boyfriend who was over for some reason a lot."

"Uh-oh."

"Yah. I mean, they were just being nice to me, I was alone, not very good at the job."

"Moving boxes? Shifting numbers?"

"Yah."

"So what happened?"

"Well, she told me she was an artist, loved to draw. She said she would have taken art classes at the local college but they were closed to non-majors."

"Was she good?"

"Her drawings were of this strange place, she said it was up in her attic. Said it went on room after room, passed through by mirrors."

"Mirrors?"

"That's what she said."

"Did she show you?"

"No. They were feeling frisky."

Iris laughs loudly.

"They wanted me to use this old box camera of theirs to take closeup pornos of them making out. All clothed but still."

"Did you?"

"I told them I kept my friends by keeping my porno images of them in my head."

"Awww. They liked you, Bowie."

"The boyfriend didn't. He sat in a corner of the living room, sort of tinkering with something. I was scared it was a weapon or something."

"Really?"

"Yah."

"So nothing happened?"

"They drove me home. I got a phone call claiming my father had died in a plane crash."

"Bowie!"

"I stopped waiting, Iris. That night, I packed my knapsack & I walked out of that life."

"To where?"

"I just walked for a long while. Walking's better than waiting."

"I suppose so."

"I was traveling after awhile with an old man & his shaggy cartoon dog."

"Cartoon?"

"Yah. Animated, sentient, but obviously built by someone. Sort of a grey sheepdog. Long whiskers, googly eyes. A cartoony bark."

"Hm."

"We're staying in a room that's deep inside a parking garage. The old man, me, the cartoon dog, & his



little orange Creature companion.”

“Creature?”

“Aha. Figured.”

“The old man will leave us from time to time, calls them ‘research expeditions’ but won’t say any more.”

“How did you meet him? This is a strange story even for you.”

Bowie nods. “So finally I have to leave our room & go find him.”

“How?”

“I wasn’t sure. There was the all-night bookstore down the street.”

“Did you find him?”

“I brought my knapsack, not sure why.”

“What happened?”

Bowie darkens. “The parking garage wasn’t safe. That’s why we always kept the room’s door locked. It was kind of dark too. I heard them moving around & ran to find a place to hide. There were a lot of burnt out cars in the garage.”

“Bowie!”

“So I hid in one. But then they were all around me, knocking at the windows, trying the locks.”

“Wow. What happened?”

“I slipped from the car, ran. Tried to find the darkest place I could in the garage. Wait them out.”

“Did you?”

“I fell asleep. Then the garage guards were rousting me with flashlights. My knapsack spilled, its books & papers & I was panicked gathering them all, & just ran flat out till I was on the street.”

“What then?”

“I was alone a long time after that, Iris.”

She’s silent, squeezes his hand.

vii.

I had this dream that I was about to throw out one of these notebooks, one from about 1990, it has a zipper that, when zipped, encloses the pages within, & I was just about to throw it out, & its pages not typed out anywhere, so gone would be gone, when I looked at those pages, & maybe an old ticket stub amongst them too, & I balked, hard, at throwing them out, *no, it’s too much, I won’t—*

So when I woke up, I was shaky, feeling spooked, & the train was passing up higher & higher into the mountains & I was again unsure *why this train, why that destination—*

It slows, it stops. I climb, clumsily, off, & find myself up to my hips in mud, & look down the tracks to see a mountainous plume of water coming hard—

No. It’s a movie. The camera, you see the camera now? It pulls back & back until you see the train is only 3 incomplete cars long, up on a platform, & I am standing in a pool of muddy water, & the distant plume is a kind of special effect, a pretty trick.

“Anyway, that’s how this works,” says Paul, my old blonde bookstore colleague who now works on these kinds of motion pictures. The kinds that aren’t *really* motion pictures, but more like levels of worlds which people inhabit, not ever really knowing it’s just special effects, it’s just *movie pictures—*

It wasn’t always like this, of course, at least for some of us. We lived in the forest, you remember, peaceful, no friends because no enemies. No movie pictures, for certain, most of us didn’t even know about the books kept hid in one of the larger treehouses,

"No, it wasn't a treehouse."

"It wasn't?"

"It was that hut, the strange colored one."

"Oh. Right."

"Can I tell it?"

"OK."

The hut was one room, but it was very settled. An armchair in one corner. A filing cabinet. A little bookcase. Another armchair. Some photos on the wall.

"Wait. Photos?"

"Yeah. A few of them. Of Creatures."

"Naturally."

"Yah."

In one corner was a wooden chest. Under the blankets & pillows in it were the books. Hardly anybody knew.

"Until?"

"Until what?"

"The story?"

"Oh. The armies came. From the world above us or the one below. Nobody knew. Maybe it didn't so much matter."

"They marched out of an earth tunnel."

We're both silent.

viii.

The three girls climb the stairs into what seems like at first an ordinary attic space. Dim, a little dusty, not too bad, & there are three sleeping bags laid out side by side.

"Are we supposed to stay up here & wait?"

The others don't answer because this seems obvious, at least for now.

Traveling with Global Wall has so defined their realities for so long that they feel small & confused. He was the cohesion amongst them.

Unspoken between them is that he is handing them off to Benny Big Dreams for awhile, & so they'll have to learn how to please, & control, him.

If he's a man, most of the answer won't be too difficult.

If he's not? What if smile, pout, & wiggle don't apply?

Such their thoughts, more or less, as they fall asleep, having moved their bags closer together, for protection? Something.

"Up & adam, goils! Chop chop!"—the voice is low, amused, but commanding. Seems to come from nowhere too, as they jerk & twitch awake.

It's not where they were before. Kind of a long shadowy living room. They're still at the edge, near the door they came through. But there's furniture now, chairs & couches, & a long fireplace along one wall.

They stand. Waiting for the man, to be assessed, to assess.

The youngest one figures it out first. Global would not be surprised at this.

"We're dreaming. This is the dream version of the attic where we're still sleeping."

"Give the little lady a prize!" says the voice from somewhere & nowhere.

His voice prompts them to each look down to check herself. Nightgowns short as their sweet asses. Red for the oldest, pink for the middle, white for the youngest. Matching panties. *Oh*. Each thinks.

Yet he doesn't show himself, save as a disembodied finger, bobbing on some dream breeze, pointing them to the other end of the room, & the wall-high-&-long mirror there. They watch themselves in the mirrored murk approach. Wondering what next.

The youngest learns the trick first. Touches the cold surface of the mirror & feels her fingers go through. Keeps pushing on through until she fully arrives there. Looks back at the two of them, & herself!

They walk up close to each other, yet do not slave to each other's movements or expressions.

Suddenly smiles. Gestures to the others to come along. They hesitate, then approach. Enter. Look back.

"Have fun, goils! Stay close together, though. I promised to return three of you when he comes!"

"Are you Benny?" asks the youngest.

"I is."

"Can we see you?"

"Maybe later."

"Why not now?"

The voice laughs. "There are tricks & traps. Floors & doors that are not what they seem. If it feels too far, return a ways back. But all of you, remember. Promise me?"

"If we can see you."

"Promise," the voice now very male & commanding. They know it from Global. They all three nod.

"Have fun, goils!"—& then a sense Benny Big Dreams was gone for now.



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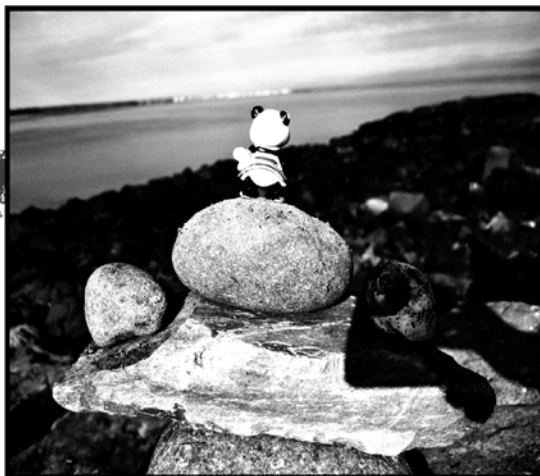
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NEW ENGLAND

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Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She is the finest companion I could hope for in making this journal, in life, in everything. *Finer than fine*.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. So happy to have my friend Eurydice back to be making this journal rightly as it ought to be.

Howard Zinn was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1922, & died in Santa Monica, California in 2010. Best known by many for his seminal work, *A People's History of the United States* (1980), this was one of many, many books he published in his long career as a writer & academic. Scriptor Press plans to feature some of his work in the 2016 Burning Man Books series.

* * * * *





Dreams they complicate my life (Dreams they
compliment my life)

-- R.E.M., "Get Up"

